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August/September 2000

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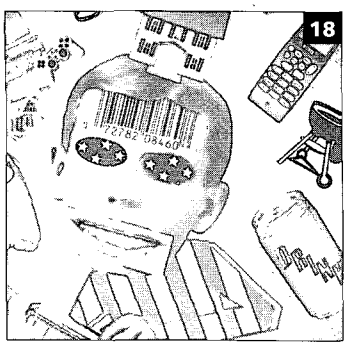

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Cutting Out the Middlemen

It's easier than ever for artists to reach audiences directly. But is that always a good thing?

By Nick Gillespie

It's a pretty safe bet that once *Time* magazine has taken note of a cultural trend or topic, it's on its last legs, if not totally over. After all, it took that earnest weekly until 1966 to finally pose the late-19th-century conversation-starter, "Is God Dead?"

Occasionally, however, *Time* stumbles onto something before it's completely yesterday's news. This spring, for instance, the magazine extolled the virtues of the vast increase in music, literature, video, and other forms of creative expression made possible by ever-cheaper and increasingly widespread technology. While hardly a new phenomenon, cultural proliferation will only continue to grow over the coming years. (See "All Culture, All the Time," April 1999.)

Time's take on the phenomenon was a March 27 cover story titled "Do-It-Yourself.Com," illustrated with a picture of a grinning Stephen King reaching through a computer monitor toward the reader. "If [he] can do it, so can you," said the caption, alluding to the huge success of the horror author's Web-only novella *Riding the Bullet.* (King's fans downloaded more than 500,000 copies on the e-book's first day of availability in March, netting the author an estimated $450,000.) "Who needs Hollywood when you can make your own movies, books and music?" asked *Time.*

That's a fair—and highly relevant—question. It's also one that ranges far beyond purely cultural matters to include other sorts of information-based exchanges: Who needs *Time*, say, when you can assemble your own news magazine either by writing it yourself or, more likely, culling various Web sites and listservs for stories and discussions on topics that interest you?

Certainly in the cultural realm, it appears as though the Internet is finally delivering on what cyberspace pundits once touted as "disintermediation." That's a clunky way of saying that the Internet makes it easier for producers and consumers, sellers and buyers, and artists and audiences to find one another without having to go through—or pay off—a middleman. The ability to circumvent middlemen of one sort or another is at the heart of recording-industry anxieties—and hardball lawsuits—launched against companies such as MP3.com and Napster, both of which allow people to freely circulate music in previously unimaginable ways.

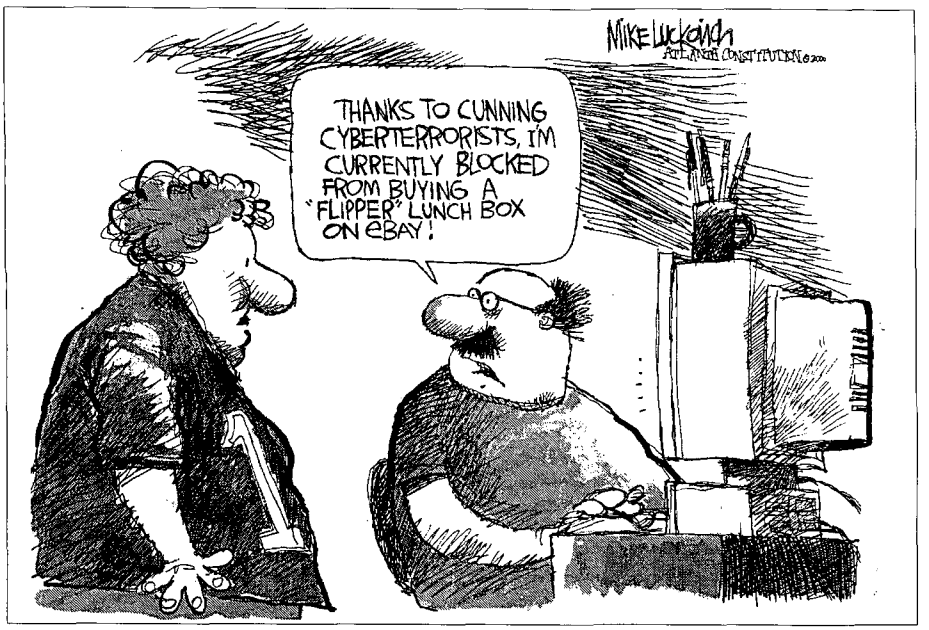
So far, most of the discussion, especially from artists' perspective, has focused on the liberatory aspects of cultural proliferation. At last, artists are saying, we can finally be totally free of the corporate types who sacrifice our visions on the altar of commerce, mass taste, conformity, or whatever. No more having to "sell your soul to the company, who are waiting there to sell plastic ware," as the Byrds put it years ago in "So You Want To Be a Rock and Roll Star," their widely covered, ironic slap at stultifying record labels. (It's not surprising that, at this stage anyway, much of the activity and rhetoric on the Web revolves around music. Not only are software programs and social protocols for distributing music currently more advanced than for other forms of art, but popular music, especially rock, remains a bastion of often unabashedly romantic ideas about the visionary artist suffering at the hands of unenlightened overseers.)

But the new terms of exchange are more complicated than most observers, certainly most artists, have generally acknowledged. The dreaded middleman—the publisher, the label, the editor, the producer—is often not simply incidental to the transaction, but an active participant who brings artist and audience together for a mutually satisfactory interaction. And the same developments that give an artist an unprecedented ability to directly engage his or her audience give that audience the ability to make greater demands on the artist, or to turn away completely.

"The middleman," announces *Time*, "is endangered. If you're unknown, you can avoid the middleman by using the Net to be discovered and attain stardom. And if you're already a star, you can avoid the middleman by using the Net to keep most of the money yourself." It's hardly surprising that *Time*, as a huge-circulation cash cow of a giant corporation, casts the promise of disintermediation starkly in terms of stardom and big bucks, rather than anything as impecunious as, say, self-expression.

But a similar message runs throughout virtually all thoughts on the matter, with artists almost univocally trumpeting Net-based disintermediation as a way of avoiding the suits who impinge on true genius and unfettered artistic expression. In a typical comment, rapper Ice-T, who has released an entire album online, recently told the ZDNet Music site (www.music.zdnet.com), "I think the benefits of putting [music] online, from the artist's perspective, is that you have more control over your own music. You essentially have direct contact with your fans."

Musician Todd Rundgren, best known for such long-ago hits as "Hello, It's Me" and "Bang the Drum All Day," develops the same point on his subscription-based Web site (www.tr-i.com). "If I were to go to a record label and ask for a deal," he writes, "they would make a guess as to how many people would buy the record and give me an advance based on that number, in effect lending me some fraction of the money that my fans would eventually (2 or so years later) pony up. It occurred to me that with the aid of some modern advances I could go directly to my audience, ask them if they would commit to buying the music, and then deliver it to them as it is produced, thus eliminating the middlemen."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MIKE LUCKOVICH

For fees ranging between $10 and $60 a year, Rundgren offers fans varying levels of access to his creative process. For $25, for example, subscribers get to preview and download new music, check out "rarities and oddities available to members only," have custom tapes or CDs made, participate in online chats with Rundgren, attend a "live" online event, and receive "something in the mail that looks and feels remarkably like an old fashioned album jacket." Rundgren also holds forth the possibility that the medium may fundamentally change and enrich his offerings. Unconstrained by "the limitations of manufacturing," he even suggests that he'll be able to "complete and deliver ideas that might not normally appear on a CD."

That's a pretty good deal if you're a devotee of a recording artist whose new music receives essentially no air time and who is, by his own admission, unlikely to crop up on MTV or VH-1 anytime soon. In fact, it seems a perfect arrangement for an idiosyncratic performer with a small but intense audience. According to the *New York Times*, about 2,000 subscribers have signed up for Rundgren's site, shelling out $60 each on average for a year's worth of access.

Long known as an early adopter of technology—he was among the first rock stars to get into video and he released the first interactive music CD—Rundgren's venture is surely only one of the first such experiments in direct contact between artists and audiences. If his grander plans pan out, he will be intimately involved in launching many such sites: Rundgren is a "founding father" of ArtistEnt (www.artistent.com), a Web site that will host artist-subscription services and other offerings.

However, despite its liberating effects, it's far from clear whether disintermediation is an unalloyed good when it comes to artistic production. There's no question that cheaper means of production and distribution grant artists important new ways of expressing themselves outside traditional channels that have often worked to stifle innovation and expression. Yet there's also no question that, as in more strictly economic exchanges, various sorts of brokers often add significant value to cultural offerings, especially for the audience.

For instance, simply by putting their name on a CD or novel, record labels and publishers convey meaningful information to potential buyers: You're unlikely to confuse an offering from Rounder Records with one from Warp.

Perhaps more important, artists can be notoriously bad judges of their own material, and once they reach any level of renown, they often seek to insulate themselves precisely from the sort of criticism that helps sharpen and focus their work. Middlemen—including record companies and producers and book publishers and editors—can provide helpful and often critically necessary feedback during the creative process.

Novelist Thomas Wolfe, for example, was infamous for delivering thousands of manuscript pages to his publishers, where editors such as Maxwell Perkins and Edward C. Aswell would sometimes literally cut and paste them into coherent narratives. In fact, the "editing" of Wolfe's manuscripts, particularly after his unexpected death in 1938, has generated serious claims that Aswell was effectively a coauthor of the novels *The Web and the Rock* and *You Can't Go Home Again.*

While Wolfe scholars might find his unedited manuscripts worth poring over, it's unlikely he would have many—if any—readers had he not been edited so aggressively in the first place. (Such disputes are common: A similar controversy has erupted recently over the author-editor relationship between Raymond Carver, the single most influential American short-story writer of the past three decades, and Gordon Lish, who radically altered—and relentlessly promoted—Carver's name-making early work.)

As a successful and respected record producer, Rundgren himself is well-known, if not notorious, for angering bands by insisting they do things *his* way in the studio. In 1987, for instance, he was hired by Geffen Records to produce XTC's *Skylarking*; though the album was highly regarded and proved to be the band's best-selling record, members attacked Rundgren in the press for his heavy hand in the studio.

Of course, the battle of will between artists on the one hand and editors and producers on the other is nothing new. Nor are artists' attempts to do an end-run around the struggle by setting up their own shops. Rembrandt, Alexander Dumas, the actors who started United Artists in 1919, and rock acts ranging from the Grateful Dead to Prince to Fugazi provide examples of such entrepreneurship.

By slashing production and distribution costs, the Web certainly makes that process easier than ever, even as it increases competition for an audience's time. Whether such freedom is used wisely or poorly will be up to individual artists—and whatever following they manage to cultivate.

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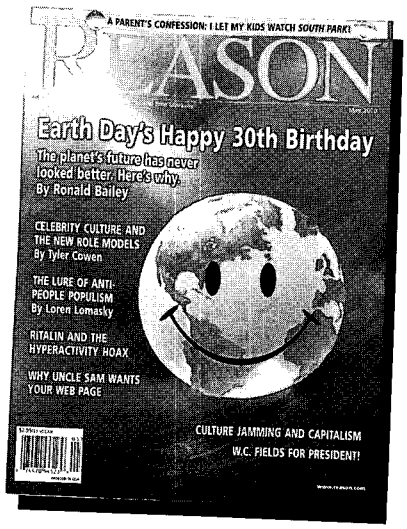
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By Ronald Bailey
CELEBRITY CULTURE AND THE NEW ROLE MODELS
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THE LURE OF ANTI-PEOPLE POPULISM
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RITALIN AND THE HYPERACTIVITY HOAX
WHY UNCLE SAM WANTS YOUR WEB PAGE
CULTURE JAMMING AND CAPITALISM
W.C. FIELDS FOR PRESIDENT!

Earth Day in the Balance

I was delighted to read Ronald Bailey's "Earth Day: Then and Now" (May). I was teaching high school economics during the original Earth Day. Caught up in the hubris of the 1970 Earth Day, I was relieved of teaching duties for a period of time to develop a senior high school course in environmental economics. I fell hook, line, and sinker for the scenarios of Ehrlich, Commoner, and other doomsters.

I wrote and taught the course for three years until it was quite clear they were very wrong—that as a matter of fact the earth's store of proven resources was increasing rather than being depleted. It was also true that the wealth creation from increased production was contributing to improving the environment. I decided to drop the course and roll a few of its good ideas into my economics course.

Walter J. Nelson
Middlebury, VT

I was puzzled by Ronald Bailey's "Earth Day: Then and Now." He tried to show that the state of the environment is improving yet overlooked some important points, such as the effects of increased population on food production and of increased food production on the environment. He says the rates of extinction, deforestation, and population growth are decreasing. To me, these things mean not good news, merely less of the bad news.

What are these environmental gains, preservation, and enrichment Mr. Bailey speaks of? The only thing the environment seems to need to be "preserved" against is our interference. The environment is not a garden, to be "enriched" by human weeding and pruning, but a living system that humans are part of. And what time period is it in which "the planet's future has never looked better"? The time since the Industrial Revolution? Since the Ice Age? Since humans evolved?

Overall, the article gave me a slightly better understanding of the state of the environment and slightly more hope for the future. But I just can't bring myself yet to don a nice happy smiley face for the occasion.

Rachel Gatwood
Silver Spring, MD

Libertarian articles about the environment always seem to involve logging, ranching, fishing, or perhaps water rights to the Colorado River. For most of us, though, the first environmental worries that come to mind are dirty air and dirty water. I have read libertarian publications for years and have encountered (or can extrapolate) plausible nongovernmental solutions to

REASON NEWS

■ This is our annual double issue. The next issue you receive will be dated October.

■ REASON contributing cartoonist Chip Bok, whose work has graced the magazine for a decade, is the recipient of the 1999 "Reuben" for editorial cartoons for his work in the *Akron Beacon Journal*. The award, a top industry kudo named after Rube Goldberg, is given annually by the National Cartoonists Society in a number of categories. To see Bok's cartoons, go to www.reason.com/hod/bok-award.html.

just about every public policy issue I can think of except for these ultimate "tragedies of the commons."

Ronald Bailey does not really topple his own straw man assertion that "doomsters will claim whatever environmental progress has been made over the past 30 years is only a result of the warnings that they sounded." Surely on at least some issues "they were right all along" in bringing enough attention to bear on environmental problems to quicken the pace of their resolution. Mr. Bailey acknowledges, for example, that "part of the answer [to air quality improvement] lies in emissions targets set by federal, state, and local governments." In the face of continuing opposition from industry, politicians didn't dream those up on their own.

Cost-effectively or not, as rapidly as possible or not, correctly targeted or not, government prodded by zealots has cleaned up our environment—an outcome that most of us, presumably including Mr. Bailey, would agree is worthwhile. My challenge for Mr. Bailey or anyone else: What is the libertarian alternative?

Lloyd Andrew
Arnold, MD

Ronald Bailey's glowing account of the improved state of the environment should make everyone feel better. For some reason it doesn't.

I'd like to invite Mr. Bailey to visit Wyoming, still supposedly a pristine state with a population of less than 500,000 people. We could start with an outing to any one of our plains lakes, but the shoreline may be littered with trash. Or how about going into a nearby mountain range, if we could even find a parking place at the trailhead parking lot. Of course there will be large groups of hikers trekking up the trail. No visit would be complete without a trip to Jackson Hole, with its bumper-to-bumper traffic and an art gallery or souvenir store on every corner. The once-beautiful hills above town are dotted with houses. (I believe single-family dwellings are currently limited to 10,000 square feet.)

We have too many people and not enough land. And solitude, which is difficult to quantify, gets to be a rarer and rarer commodity. All of Ronald Bailey's numbers are nice. But why do I still have a hollow feeling when I see what is happening to the environment?

Lew Vavra
Laramie, WY

Ronald Bailey's article is highly irresponsible journalism in view of the worsening ecological crises abundantly documented by Worldwatch Institute and most other mainstream environmental organizations, world governments, and independent researchers.

If, as Mr. Bailey seems to suggest at one point, Lester Brown and Worldwatch aren't good sources of environmental data, then why do a host of publishers print their annual *State of the World* in some 30 languages? And why are its books used as texts in more than 1,000 U.S. colleges and universities? And why have over 1 million copies been sold?

I refer specifically to some of Mr. Bailey's outrageous claims, such as that "there's a broad consensus that exposure to synthetic chemicals, even pesticides, does not seem to be a problem," "documented animal extinctions peaked in the 1930s," "global warming is not a serious problem," "increased wealth, population, and technological development [automatically?] preserve and enrich the environment," etc.

Does he really believe that nuclear weapons research, the nuclear reactors in Chernobyl and Three Mile Island, plutonium, asbestos, PCBs, toxic waste, polluting giant industrial hog farms, and Union Carbide's chemical factory in Bhopal, India, in the 1980s have "enriched the environment"?

If pesticides and other toxic, and largely untested, synthetic chemicals are not a problem, then why in 1995 at a United Nations Environment Program conference in Washington, D.C., did environment ministers from 103 countries sign a high-level declaration calling for a legally binding global treaty to reduce and eventually eliminate Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs)? And why in 2000 is the U.N. continuing to sponsor international negotiations to phaseout POPs, especially highly dangerous organochlorines, including pesticides and industrial chemicals and by-products such as PCBs and dioxin?

And why did a 1999 study by the Consumers Union find that domestic fruits and vegetables often exceed the safe exposure limit set by the EPA for young children? And why are increasing numbers of consumers buying, and growing, organic food?

Bailey denies animal extinctions are a growing problem, yet renowned Harvard biologist Edward O. Wilson calculates that at least 50,000 species are becoming extinct every year and that the rate is escalating. Paleontologist Peter Ward in *The End of Evolution* documents "the third mass extinction facing planet Earth." A poll by Louis Harris and the American Museum of Natural History found that "seven out of ten biologists believe the world is now in the midst of the fastest mass extinction of living things in the 4.5 billion-year history of the planet." Nearly 25 percent of the 4,600 species of mammals, especially the primates, are threatened with extinction. Estimates are that at least two out of every three of the 10,000 species of birds are in decline worldwide. Some 20–25 percent of the 10,000 surveyed reptiles and amphibians rank as endangered or vulnerable.

Is the planet's ecological future more promising than ever? There are countless reasons to question this wild claim. If global warming isn't a problem, then why are the vast majority of independent scientists (i.e., those not on industry's payroll) claiming otherwise? And why are world automakers beginning to develop alternatives to fossil-fuel-based engines? And, why are international insurance companies paying out record claims (close to $100 billion a year) in climate-related disasters?

continued on page 71

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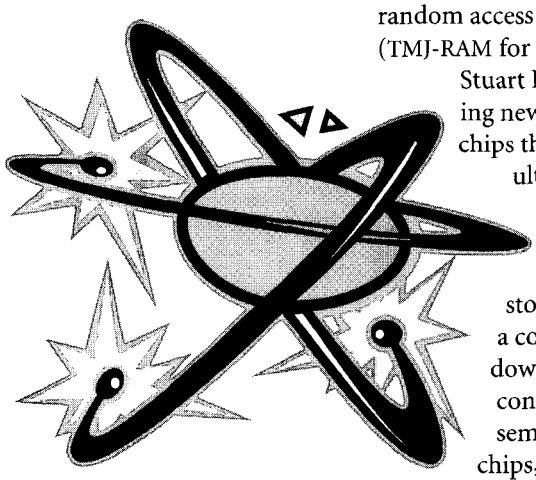
Citings

Quantum Leaps

By Ronald Bailey

Technodoomster Bill Joy, the Sun Microsystems "chief scientist" who recently fretted in *Wired* that "it is far easier to create destructive uses for nanotechnology than constructive ones," must be despondent at the recent rapid progress of research in that field. Nanotech is the still speculative but increasingly plausible notion of computing and manufacturing at the molecular level.

Earlier this year IBM scientists announced that they had created an atomic-scale circuit based on "quantum mirages." The mirage appears in a quantum corral measuring 20 nanometers across. (A nanometer is around 40 billionths of an inch—about five atoms placed side by side.) The elliptical corral was created using cobalt atoms precisely placed by a scanning tunneling microscope on a copper surface. When an additional cobalt atom was put inside the corral at one of the foci of the ellipse, the quantum waves transmitted a weak duplicate image or "mirage" of the atom to the other focus in the corral. This technique makes it possible to transmit information without using wires and allows for far greater densities of circuits, which would need far less power to operate.



Still, Joy can relax for a few more years. "We must make significant improvements before this method becomes useful in actual circuits. Making each ellipse ...is currently impractically slow," researcher Hari Manoharan noted in IBM's press release. "They would have to be easily and rapidly produced, connections to other components would also have to be devised and a rapid and power-efficient way to modulate the available quantum states would need to be developed."

But there's been progress on that front, too. Using tunneling magnetic junction random access memory (TMJ-RAM for short), IBM's Stuart Parkin is devising new memory chips that will be ultra-fast, will consume less power, and will retain stored data when a computer shuts down. Unlike conventional semiconductor chips, which operate using the charge of electrons, Parkin's chips exploit a weird quantum mechanical property called "spin."

Every electron exists in one of two states, spin-up or spin-down. Spintronic researchers sandwich gold atoms between two thin films of magnetic material that act as filters or valves, permitting electrons in one of the two spin states to pass. A tiny burst of current can change the state of the filter and thus the spin of the electrons. Once they pass through the filters, the atoms keep their spin state indefinitely, so the memory doesn't need any power to maintain it. Furthermore, spintronic devices can be made vastly smaller than electronic devices.

Asked how such technology will evolve in the future, Parkin made a prediction that would no doubt send an eschatological chill down Bill Joy's spine. "It will be completely integrated and pervasive, like a sufficiently intelligent black box that will take care of everything for you—even work for you," he said. "This invisible interface and seamless technology environment will be all around us."

If history is any guide, failing to let people take advantage of such technologies will be far more risky for humanity than the timid stagnation Joy evidently prefers.

Balance Sheet

By Jeff A. Taylor

ASSETS

△

▲ Gunned Up. The Texas Department of Public Safety reports that the 211,769 Texans carrying concealed handguns are about eight times less likely to be arrested for crimes than the general population. But concealed-handgun permit holders are slightly more likely to be cited for carrying a weapon into a no-no place like a courthouse or city hall.

△

△ **▲ Rung Out.** Over the next five years, phone companies and federal regulators plan to cut $3.2 billion worth of fees charged to long-distance companies by local phone companies. The fees will also be made more explicit and easier to understand. Still, $650 million in annual subsidies will lurk in the wires.

△ **▲ Party Time.** The U.S. Court of Appeals rules that the Federal Election Commission cannot limit so-called coordinated spending in congressional races. The ruling, in a case dating to 1986, found that such limits violate the First Amendment rights of political parties.

△ **▲ School's In.** The 1.7 million kids educated at home keep doing well in national competitions. Homeschooled kids placed high in the National Spelling Bee in recent years, with wins in 1997 and 2000. And last year's National Geography Bee winner was homeschooled, as were the second- and third-place finishers this year.

△ **▲ The Prisoner.** Big copyright owners get a brushback from RealNetworks CEO Rob Glaser, who criticizes a "damn-the-torpedoes" approach to digital copyright enforcement that targets consumers. "You don't treat users as prisoners," he says. Better to come up with new ways of distributing content, Glaser advises.

△ **▲ Mae Not.** Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan bashes subsidies for Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the federally-chartered mortgage traders. With home ownership at record highs, the M&Ms have started drifting into new areas—like floating new debt—traditionally reserved for the Treasury.

△

Beer Goggles

By Jeff A. Taylor

In April, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and

▼ **Audit-Erotic.** Juanita Broaddrick, the woman who accused President Clinton of raping her, joins the list of Clinton opponents hit with an IRS audit. Also on that list? Paula Jones, Gennifer Flowers, and former Miss America Elizabeth Ward Gracen, all of whom claim encounters with Bill.

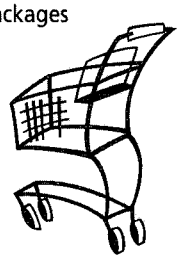
▼ **Criminal Class.** The Texas town of Lockney not only tests all elementary students for drugs; it treats skeptics as criminals. A sixth-grade boy who refused to submit to the tests was given a three-day in-school suspension, during which he had to wear an orange prison jumpsuit.

▼ **Jack-Boots A Go-Go.** Federal law enforcement is a growth industry. Federal criminal court cases rose nearly 13 percent between 1997 and 1998. And in 1998 there were 83,000 federal law-enforcement officers, up 17 percent in five years.

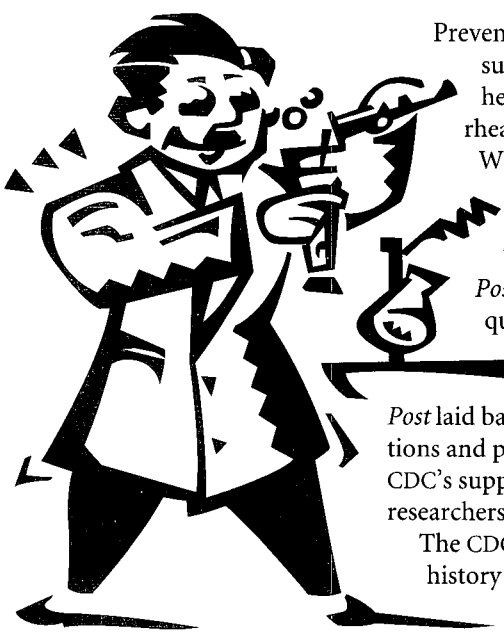
▼ **Frog Gagging.** The French parliament considers "The Liberty of Communication Act," which would require anyone publishing a Web page in France to register with the government. French ISPs predict a cyber-exodus if the bill becomes law.

▼ **Drug Courier.** The Food and Drug Administration vows to track down overseas Web sites that ship non–FDA-approved drugs to Americans. Ultimately it might be up to the U.S. Customs Service to seize and search suspicious packages as they cross the border.

▼ **Food Fight.** In order to protect consumers, the Federal Trade Commission forces the Hannaford Bros. grocery chain to close several stores before it completes a $3.6 billion merger with the corporate owner of Food Lion. The consumers' take? "I am just devastated," says one.



LIABILITIES



Prevention uncorked such a howler—headlined "Gonorrhea Rates Decline With Higher Beer Tax"—that even *The Washington Post* was moved to question the conclusions. In doing so, the *Post* laid bare the motivations and prejudices of the CDC's supposedly unbiased researchers.

The CDC claimed recent history showed that cases of the clap declined when beer prices went up. So, reasoned the government's wonks, "a 20-cent state tax increase per six-pack of beer could reduce U.S. gonorrhea rates by almost 9 per cent." The *Post* had the good sense to ask David Murray of the Statistical Assessment Service, a non-profit think tank in D.C., about the study.

STATS does yeoman's work pointing out the junk reasoning at the root of so much junk science. This one was a high, hanging curve for Murray, who said the CDC's thinking was on the level of "the sun goes down because we turn on the street lights."

The really interesting thing is that the CDC, in effect, agrees with that criticism. It buries its assent, however, in an editorial note that says the findings "do not prove a causal relation between higher taxes and declining STD [sexually transmitted disease] rates." Meanwhile, the study gives the CDC a way to generate coverage for a policy change it would like to see implemented.

"The study findings are consistent with the idea that higher taxes can reduce STD rates," Harrell Chesson, a health economist and linguistic contortionist with the CDC, told the *Post*. "We said higher taxes could reduce the rate. We didn't say they would."

The Right to Boyhood

By Michael W. Lynch

Things looked gloomy for fourth-grader Brandon MacLean in October 1998. He had made a mistake young boys rarely recover from in these days of zero tolerance: He had carried a ▶

SOURCES

As the Democrats and Republicans coronate their presidential nominees, dissatisfaction with the major parties is reaching a new high. **If a third-party candidate with "a legitimate chance of winning" were running, 26 percent of likely voters say they'd vote for him or her**, according to a recent survey by Rasmussen Research (**www.portraitofamerica.com/html/poll-717.html**).

The 2000 presidential race includes several alternative parties, though none seem to have that requisite chance of victory. The most prominent is Ross Perot's Reform Party (**www.reformparty.org**), which lost its most libertarian faction when Minnesota Gov. Jesse Ventura left it but still boasts enough room for both black militant Lenora Fulani and the party's presumptive nominee, Pat Buchanan (**www.buchanan.org**).

The anti-corporate Green Party (**www.greenparties.org**) is also attracting attention, with standard-bearer Ralph Nader (**www.nader2000.org**) outpolling Buchanan in some surveys. At press time, the Libertarian Party (**www.lp.org**) has not yet selected a nominee, but the odds-on favorite is financial writer Harry Browne (**www. harrybrowne.org**). Other options range from socialist David McReynolds (**www. votesocialist.org/bio. html**) to paleoconservative Howard Phillips (**www.constitutionparty.org**).

And don't forget your precious right to do what most Americans do: skip voting altogether. For some defenses of abstention, see **www.infoshop.org/voting.html**.

BRICKBATS

◆ San Francisco has moved to fire 37 city bus drivers after finding that they've had their licenses suspended for offenses such as drunken and reckless driving. Not to fear, none of them are on active duty. They're all out on disability. "There was an uncanny relationship between the time somebody lost their license and when they went out on worker's comp," noted transit boss Michael Burns. Meanwhile, the drivers' union has vowed to fight the dismissals. "The guy is already having to pay a big fine from the state, so this is double jeopardy," one union official explained.

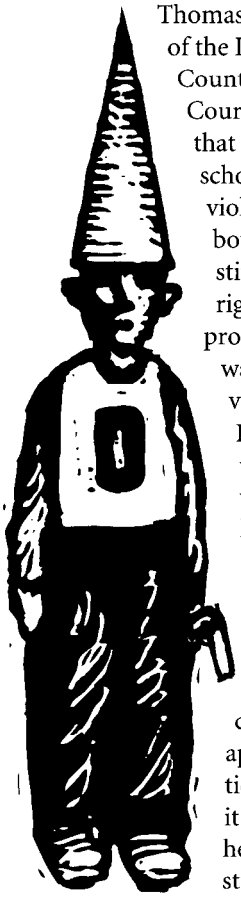
◆ Officials meeting at the League of California Cities' annual conference got to hear political consultant Max Besler advise them on how to slip taxes past unwitting voters. He recommends "run silent, run deep" tactics, and says to avoid the word *tax*. Another piece of his advice: "Don't do any press releases."

◆ The Drug Enforcement Administration raided Nelson Robles' house at 4 a.m., rousting him, his wife, and son. Turns out they had the wrong Nelson Robles: Their man was 15 years younger and lived at a completely different address in Miami. When the agents discovered they had the wrong man, they didn't apologize. Instead, they searched his house anyway to see if he was hiding the other Nelson. Robles isn't related to the younger man and had never even met him.

toy gun to school, concealing it throughout the day in his backpack but revealing it to friends on the walk home. The five-and-a-half-inch green gun shot the most dangerous ammo available: hollow-point foam bullets, know as *sister annoyers* on the street. Two neighborhood kids reported the incident to their mommy, who, evidently tired of snooping through the neighbors' mail in search of Victoria's Secret catalogs and other signs of degeneracy, notified the school.

Brandon faced expulsion. The school showed some mercy, though, instead suspending him for 10 days, of which he served six. Meanwhile, the MacLeans secured an attorney, who took the case to court to clear the boy's record.

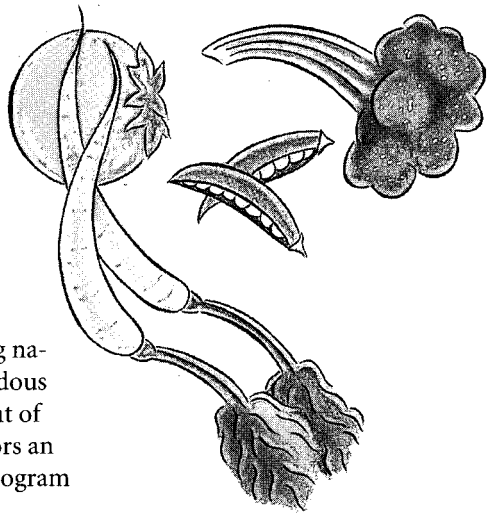
Brandon finally got justice on May 2, 2000, more than a year and a half after the original incident, when Judge Thomas Horne of the Loudoun County Circuit Court ruled that the school had violated the boy's constitutional right to due process. This was a clear victory for Brandon, who now won't have to report the suspension on his college applications. But it failed to help other students who've run afoul of zealous zero-tolerance policies—such as the kindergartner from Deer Lakes, Pennsylvania, who a couple of years ago was suspended after he accessorized his Halloween firefighter costume with a plastic ax.



Toxic Carrots

By Brian J. Taylor

Environmentalists and government officials have long dreamed of harnessing nature to clean up hazardous waste. The Department of Energy already sponsors an exhaustive research program in "bioremediation," a process that uses living organisms to reduce toxic substances (A rundown of the program is available at www.lbl.gov/NABIR/.) But



AUG/SEPT 1975 AUG/SEPT 1975 AUG/SEPT 1975 25 YEARS AGO IN REASON

☛ "This is one of the reasons for secrecy—to keep the American public from knowing. I mean, the Laotians know when they're being bombed—the Chileans know when they're being overthrown—the Portuguese know when we're mucking about in their affairs and so on—but the idea is to keep it from the American public."

—"The CIA: Protector or Menace? An Interview With Victor Marchetti"

☛ "The newsmen continue to imagine that you can have intellectual freedom without the free market. The businessmen continue to imagine that you can have the free market without intellectual freedom. Both are actually losing their liberty."

—Edith Efron, "The Free Mind and the Free Market"

☛ "Have you ever tried growing marijuana? If you've a perfect field with lots of sunlight, or a huge closet fitted out with special lights, and you can recognize a female plant (women's lib take note: male plants just can't do it), and you've studied horticulture long enough to grow orchids in an icebox, you're golden. But if you're a civilian marijuana plant grower? Forget it....So if the state finally goes ahead and decriminalizes marijuana use, without decriminalizing marijuana sale, it means about as much as voting for a constitutional amendment against busing but not voting to get such legislation to the floor of the House."

—David Brudnoy, "Getting Down to the Well on Busing"

the most promising recent development has come from the private sector.

Colorado entrepreneur Frank Burcik recently completed a pilot project demonstrating that vegetables and other plants could absorb metals from toxic waste runoff, using a process called phytoremediation. Burcik, president of Water Treatment and Decontamination International, set up his hydroponic underground lab in a mine drainage tunnel in Leadville, Colorado. The runoff water coursed through sets of troughs containing assorted veggies, including carrots, beets, spinach, and broccoli. Seventy percent of the metal contaminates were removed in the process.

The Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation are interested in transplanting Burcik's process as early as next year to help clean the California Gulch Superfund site. And World Bank officials say they're intrigued by the potential applications in less developed countries.

DATA

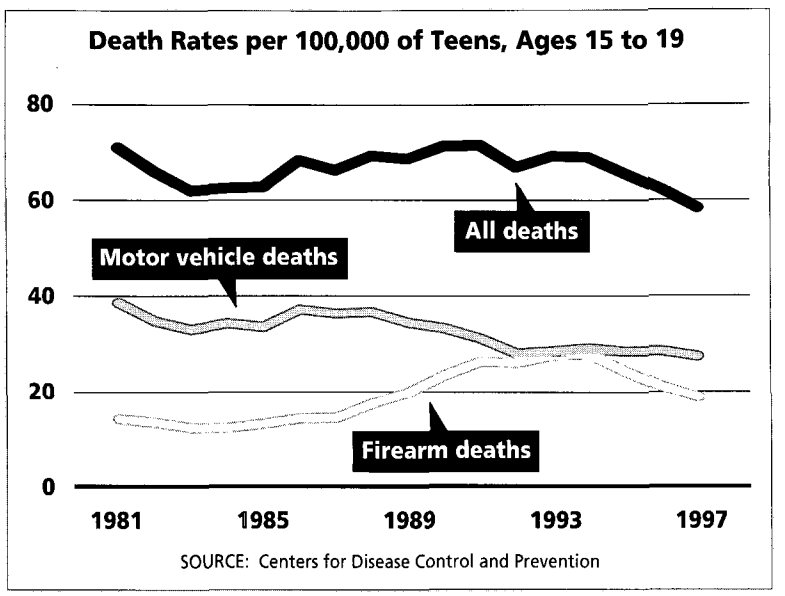
Getting Better All the Time

By Michael W. Lynch

"Ask any teen: growing up today feels tougher than ever," Hillary Rodham Clinton wrote recently in *Newsweek*, justifying her May White House Conference on Teenagers. "While the cases may be extreme, the tragedies at Columbine High School...and just recently at the National Zoo, are chilling reminders of the stress, alienation and violence that can overwhelm a troubled teen."

It's difficult to know how today's teens could compare their troubles to those of past generations, but many statistical indicators show that the lives of children in general, and teens in particular, are actually improving.

"Children are living healthier and safer lives than ever before," concludes Kimberly M. Thompson, assistant professor of analysis and decision science at Harvard, in the April 2000 issue of *Risk in Perspective*. Looking back a century, Thompson points out that today's children can expect to live 30 extra years. As for Hillary's teenagers, they're best off not listening to politically motivated adults and relaxing a little bit instead. Their world is far from perfect, but it's also a place where death before the end of one's second decade is decidedly less likely than it once was.

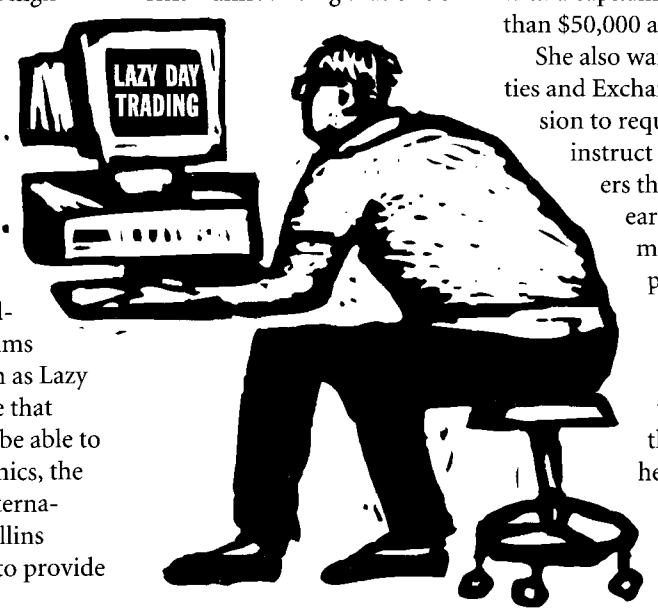


No Trading Today

By Brian J. Taylor

Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) is no fan of the day-trading industry. As chair of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, she recently concluded an eight-month probe of day-trading firms and practices. Her report (available at www.senate.gov/~gov_affairs/022400_report.htm) argues that we need more regulations and oversight to curb abuses.

Targeting "serious" traders, who average 29 trades per day, and the relatively small but growing number of day-trading companies that provide customers with high-speed terminals and real-time quotes (currently an estimated 60 firms nationally), Collins calls day trading "little more than a game of chance." Amazed by the boldness of industry claims and ad pitches, such as Lazy Day Trader's pledge that "You don't have to be able to understand Economics, the Stock Market or International Finance," Collins wants the industry to provide unambiguous warnings of risk—announcing that one's chances of making money with a capitalization of less than $50,000 are slim.



She also wants the Securities and Exchange Commission to require firms to instruct potential traders that they must earn substantial money simply to pay their trading commissions (an average of $16 per trade), and ban them from helping customers secure loans to pay for margin ▶

BRICKBATS

◆ Florida Gov. Jeb Bush wants students to be tested in the fourth, fifth, eighth, and 10th grades, so parents can tell just how well their schools are educating children. His plan, passed last year, links teacher salaries and vouchers to school performance. Some teachers are still crying foul, but not, they say, because they'd lose money if their students don't pass the tests. Oh, no. They say they're concerned about the children. "Can you imagine what it's like to...see [students] just put their heads down and cry because they don't know the answers on the test?" one elementary school teacher asked.

◆ In Virginia's Spotswood High School, Jeff Newton posted a list of 60 books that have been banned, including such fare as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, The Color Purple,* and *Of Mice and Men.* After a parent complained, Principal Jim Slye told him to take the list down because it wasn't part of any class curriculum, and some of the books on the list haven't been approved by school officials.

◆ Sylvia Johnson was dismissed from the Internal Revenue Service after the agency found she had improperly accessed the personal returns of taxpayers 476 times. Now she's suing to get her job back. She says her firing didn't "promote the efficiency of the service" and violated her due process rights. She's also claiming discrimination, saying the IRS fired her because she's black.

—Charles Oliver

calls. Even if Collins is right, and the majority of serious day traders are losing money, it doesn't follow that the state has an interest in protecting the traders from themselves.

By insulating adults from the consequences of their behavior and their risk calculations, traders are denied a valuable education. There are many things hapless day traders can learn if not shielded from their ill-advised financial decisions, not least of which are the complexities of economics, the stock market, and international finance. But don't worry, casual traders, Collins isn't targeting the vastly more numerous online traders at E-Trade, Datek, or Ameritrade—yet.

Serious Gatekeepers

By Jesse Walker

The Library of Congress is not a user-friendly institution. The stacks are closed, so if you want to look at a book, you have to fill out a form and ask a librarian to fetch it for you. If you're lucky, you'll get it within two hours. If you're really lucky, it'll actually have the information you were looking for; if not, you're back at step one. And you can't take any tomes home.

Now some of the library's materials have been put on the Internet. Accessing them is a completely different experience: fast, fun, and fruitful. Scouting through its American Memory site (lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem), one can enjoy everything from early *Krazy Kat* films to haunting old Ukrainian-American music to photos from Orson Welles' famous all-black production of *Macbeth.* But don't expect any books to join those materials online soon.

"There is something about a book that should inspire a certain presumption of reverence," Librarian of Congress James Billington explained to the National Press Club in April. "It is dangerous to promote the illusion that you can get anything you want by sitting in front of a computer screen."

The Internet, he claimed, is "isolating" and "lonely." Libraries, by contrast, are "a community thing." Ah—*now* we know why we have to wait so long for our books at the Library of Congress. It's so we'll have time to *socialize.* Provided, of course, that we keep our communal bonding to a whisper.

Access Excess

By Jesse Walker

Late last year, the federal Access Board announced its plans "to revise and update its accessibility guidelines for buildings and facilities covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act...and the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968." Among its recommendations: Make fire alarms more useful to deaf people by adding a flashing strobe light to the devices' familiar shrieks.

As the May 2000 deadline for public comments drew near, the proposal was attacked by another disabled constituency: epileptics. It turns out, to quote the Epilepsy Foundation, that "strobe-equipped alarms have caused seizures in people in workplaces, apartment buildings, colleges and schools. Should a seizure be caused by stroboscopic alarms during an actual fire emergency, that person would be incapacitated, leading to even more danger both from the seizure and [from] the emergency itself."

In other words, the Access Board faces a choice: let deaf men sit unaware as their building burns around them, or condemn their epileptic cohorts to quiver uncontrollably on the floor, unable to crawl to safety. Or else—now here's a thought—let each landlord decide which tradeoff he prefers to make, or even come up with a new solution of his own.

Plats Interdits

By Charles Paul Freund

If you want to dine at Paris' Le Coin de Verre, you'd be wise to expect the dinner cops to join you for dessert: The menu at this restaurant in the largely North African neighborhood of Belleville is filled with forbidden food. No, there aren't any magic mushrooms or anything along those lines (that remains a Dutch specialty). This place features such morsels as beef on the bone, Corsican cheese, and little sausages known as *andouillettes*, all of which are quite well known to anyone who likes traditional French food (a group reputed to include much of the French populace), and all of which have been regulated off Europe's dinner tables in recent years by the European Union's zero-risk food rules.

According to Britain's *Sunday Telegraph*, Le Coin de Verre is at the forefront of "a culinary resistance movement" dedicated to flouting the E.U.'s food-safety regulations. Why bother? Because these dishes taste good, despite (or in some cases because of) the microbes and other ingredients that frighten regulators. As owner Hugues Calliger sensibly told the *Telegraph*, "Risky food should be marked and labeled. The people should be free to eat it if they choose."

This new French resistance continues a national tradition that has staked out territory where the state treads in vain. Although the French have embraced a high level of government involvement in the workplace and the school (indeed, they'll riot if the state threatens to pull out), they've refused to abide by most laws affecting personal pleasures. France has almost as many anti-smoking rules as the United States, for example, but no one obeys them. The Académie Française, which regulates the French language, impotently insists that such terms as *le balladeur* be used rather than *le Walkman*. The French famously regard American medical attitudes toward drinking (never mind cholesterol) as nonsense.

And now this. Someone should have warned the E.U. that it was the French who discovered the first lesson of revolution: If you want to make an omelet, you've got to break an egg.

SOUNDBITE

Out of Africa

By Michael W. Lynch

Spring's dominant trade story was the fight over permanent trade relations with China. But one week before the China vote, President Clinton signed another bill to expand trade among the United States, Africa, and countries in the Caribbean. The Trade Development Act of 2000, which combined the African Growth and Opportunity Act and the Caribbean Basin Trade Partnership Act, abolishes tariffs on clothes made in Africa with American yarn and fabric and increases the limits on other textiles from Africa.

Washington Editor Michael W. Lynch talked with the bill's co-sponsor, Rep. Edward Royce (R-Calif.), in late May.

Rep. Edward Royce

Q: Why a trade bill directed at Africa?

A: We have endeavored to reduce tariffs around the world. In 1950, the average tariff, worldwide, was 40 percent. Today, it's 4 percent. The exception to that rule has been trade with Sub-Saharan Africa, where the average tariff on textiles is still 18 percent.

Q: You've been at this for years. Why did it pass now?

A: Our arguments about moving Africa from aid to trade made it difficult for people to say, "We're all for foreign aid to Africa, but we're against opening our markets to African goods. Don't let them sell any cloth or textiles in the United States." It's difficult to argue that the only approach we could have to Africa is one of dependency.

Q: Supporters of trade always highlight increased exports, not the benefits of inexpensive imports. Why is it so tough to sell trade based on the idea that if people elsewhere can do something more efficiently, we ought to let them?

A: People don't immediately grasp comparative advantage. It took Adam Smith a generation to convince the British Empire that mercantilism wasn't in its interest. We've had the same resistance even with the evidence right before our eyes: the lowest unemployment numbers and the greatest creation of wealth in recent U.S. history.

I've joked with colleagues that if I put in the Smoot-Hawley Act today, we could find a number of representatives who would co-sponsor it before they realized it was the same bill that helped set off a worldwide depression. This is a struggle that has gone on for years, and will continue to go on. What I saw in Seattle convinces me that there is tremendous pent-up hostility that is directed not just at trade but at liberalizing markets and technology. There is this reactionary element in society. This is a battle of ideas.

Presidential Contenders

In which our man in Washington hears Earthtone Al and Dubya Bush lower their voices reverently and D.C.'s mayor support vouchers

By Michael W. Lynch

Subj: China Good, Cuba Bad
Date: 5/30/2000 6:55:49 PM
From: mwlynch@reason.com

I headed over to the National Press Club last week, along with 300 to 400 of my closest colleagues in the Washington press corps, to catch George W. Bush. I was eager to witness Dubya answering unscripted questions. My hunch was that Bush gets a bad rap—"the English Patient" is his handle among some who travel with him—and that he couldn't be as bad as his Yale grades. He wasn't.

"I guess he's not talking about education," said a woman behind me, as Henry Kissinger, George Shultz, Colin Powell, and other GOP foreign policy luminaries took their places between the podium and 12 American flags. Once the elders were settled, Bush commenced.

He got off to an awkward start, reading the prepared text of his big foreign policy announcement. Surrounded by Cold Warriors, he accused the Clinton administration of being "locked in a Cold War mentality," declared his intention to build a missile defense system to protect all 50 states and select allies, and promised to unilaterally reduce America's weapon stockpiles to the lowest level consistent with our national security.

He was trying a tad too hard. Like a first grader learning to read in front of class, Bush put all his energy into pronouncing each word correctly, at the cost of sentence and paragraph flow. If I wasn't reading the prepared text, I'm not sure I could have absorbed his speech.

He had no such problems in Q&A, when he answered questions directly and cut up the room with humor.

What's the difference, asked one reporter, between China's communist government and Cuba when you consider things like freedom of the press, fair elections, oppression of minorities, and attacks on religious movements with no political intentions? Bush didn't duck the question, but he lapsed back into the very Cold War mindset he'd been decrying.

"The difference is, uh, as far as I'm concerned, that we are trading with an entrepreneurial class in China. That by trading with China we are encouraging a group of entrepreneurs, small business owners to get a taste of freedom," said Dubya, lowering his voice reverently when uttering "taste of freedom." "That's not the case in Cuba. In Cuba we are trading with government-controlled entities."

So I guess a President G.W. would have no objections to day trips to Cuba, where Americans could engage in one-on-one trade with small entrepreneurs and give them a taste of post–Cold War freedom? Don't count on it. What's the *real* difference between China and Cuba when it comes to trade? Only this: An organized voting bloc in an important state that happens to be governed by Bush's brother. Which is too bad. I'd take a Cuban-rolled Cohiba over a Chinese-stitched shirt any day.

Subj: Class of 2000 & 2004
Date: 5/31/2000 5:57:22 PM
From: mwlynch@reason.com

It wasn't easy getting me to show up for school, let alone for optional events like graduation. But when Patrick Purtill of the Washington Scholarship Fund, which provides partial tuition scholarships to low-income D.C. kids, called to invite me to its graduation, I marked my calendar. The ceremony for 75 eighth graders and six high school seniors was held at St. Augustine Catholic School, which is attached to D.C.'s oldest black Catholic church.

The auditorium was packed. Two students delivered remarks, thanking their families, their teachers, and the scholarship foundation. Ashley Tardy, the eighth-grade speaker, paraphrased Ben Franklin to the effect that "if a man empties his purse into his head, no one can take that away from him." Stephanie Lawrence, who graduated from the Bullis School and is headed to Dickinson College next year to pursue a pre-med major, waxed poetic: "Education is like going on a journey," she said. "It helps you discover who you are and who you want to become."

D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams rose to speak after the students. He talked about why education mattered and dwelled on the sacrifices the children's parents had made for them to be able to achieve what they have. Williams' dad, it seems, was a decorated veteran of World War II who returned home not to parades, but to a job at the U.S.P.S., where he worked for the next 40 years without a single day off, all to support his eight children.

I'm not sure whether that was meant to inspire the kids or just scare the hell out of them—40 years at the post office is about the best motivational message

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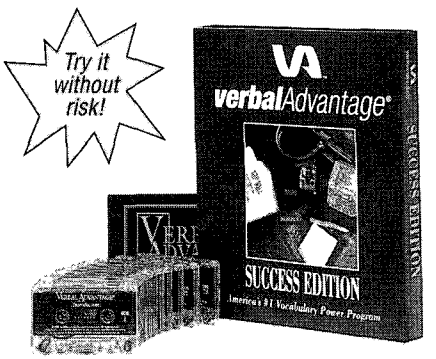

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out there to go to college. The mayor followed it up by delivering the "three keys" to success: Believe in God, work together, and pay attention to the basics. He illustrated the second point with a story about a poor farmer's mule pulling a rich lady's Jaguar off a country road. The fable he told about sticking to the basics made even less sense. "A short cut is fine," explained Williams. "But if you don't learn the main route, a short cut doesn't do you very much good."

I caught up with the mayor after the ceremony. He was standing by his black Ford Expedition, which was parked right up in front of the school, its back door open, exposing a cup of Starbucks in the center console cup holder. A gaggle of press, asking him questions about the next fire chief, stood between him and his tepid latte.

"Good to see you man, how's everything?" he greeted me, as if I were an old drinking buddy or a regular on the city hall beat, when in fact we'd just met for the first time. I stumbled a bit, thrown off by his chumminess, but I managed to ask him if he created any controversy by speaking at a private school graduation. "I know vouchers aren't real popular with..." I mumbled, before Williams cut me off. "Why shouldn't I support every child in the city, wherever they go to school?" asked Williams. "I went to a parochial school. Why wouldn't I come here? This is my parish. I'm not connecting the dots. Maybe I'm stupid." I had no follow-up ready and he moved a step closer toward his Expedition.

Subj: Al Gore on Fatherhood
Date: 6/2/2000 6:27:28 PM
From: mwlynch@reason.com

"When Tipper and I started our own family," Vice President Al Gore revealed today at the National Fatherhood Initiative's Third National Summit on Fatherhood (sponsored in part by that great family business, Anheuser-Busch), "I was naturally eager to be involved." I'll bet he was eager.

Two dullards—Kevin Thurm, a Clintoncrat from the Department of Health and Human Services, and George Gallup Jr., of the famous polling family—spoke before the vice president hit the stage. I'm convinced that Gore operatives placed both of these fellows on the program to make Al appear dynamic. Polls, my friends, are meant to be read, not heard. And HHS bureaucrats ought never to be given a microphone.

Earthtone Al played to the audience of some 300 people who were passionate about paternity. "For too long, most of our national conversation about families has been a close-up of the mother-child bond," he said, fathering a bright, bouncing mixed metaphor. "And nobody here is saying that conversation shouldn't continue. It should. It must. But the father can no longer be cropped out of the family photograph when we are talking about families because fatherhood is an experience at the heart of the human experience."

"Why shouldn't I support every child in the city, wherever they go to school?" asked D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams.

Government, of course, is at the heart of Gore's experience and so, after stories of being a father and grandfather, Gore got around to policy. At times he sounded positively Republican. "We know that child poverty in America is often, more than by any other cause, caused by the absence of one parent in a child's life." Taking a page from his boss' playbook (the page that explains how to co-opt Republican policies), he called for ending the marriage-tax penalty, decrying it as a "fundamental flaw in the tax code's value system." The next generation of welfare reform, said Al, has to focus on making deadbeat dads pay up. We've put women to work, he said; it's time we put men to work as well.

And if they don't go to work and support their kids, he's ready to cut up their credit cards like an angry waiter in a restaurant. Promised Al, "I will urge the nation's credit card companies to deny credit to any parent who owes a substantial amount of child support." He also wants the government to set up special savings accounts for them.

But it's not just financial support that Al's concerned with. He's also worried about "emotional" deadbeat dads —"fathers who communicate with their children across a glaring TV set and don't communicate from the heart at all; fathers who pay the bills, but leave a deficit of love and caring and self-esteem in their children's lives." He didn't offer a solution to this issue, which is perhaps another indicator that the era of Big Government is indeed over: It takes some courage to admit that the state can't solve problems as pressing as the dearth of good dinner-table conversation.

Al wrapped up by recalling his own childhood and undercutting his assertion that the father who communicates over a television set is necessarily an emotional deadbeat. "The moments we learn from a father really do not come with big announcements or with bugles blowing," he said, lowering his voice for effect. "I remember watching my father bait a hook...and sit quietly for an hour. I remember him playing his fiddle for good friends late at night....I recall the way he had of looking at my mother. From such moments sons learn more from their dads about patience, joy, beauty, and love than they do from all of the lectures."

I'm sure there are times when Al wished his old man was a bit more outspoken—for instance, during his final, failed senatorial bid, Al Sr. might have told his son that he shouldn't enlist in the Vietnam War if he didn't really believe in it.

But I'm with the vice president when it comes to praising laconic fathers. I know I used to like my dad much better when he was sitting quietly for an hour than when he was lecturing me about getting caught by the cops for being underage and drunk in public.

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IN PRAISE OF Consumerism

Sell them their dreams. Sell them what they longed for and hoped for and almost despaired of having. Sell them hats by splashing sunlight across them. Sell them dreams—dreams of country clubs and proms and visions of what might happen if only. After all, people don't buy things to have things. They buy things to work for them. They buy hope—hope of what your merchandise will do for them. Sell them this hope and you won't have to worry about selling them goods.

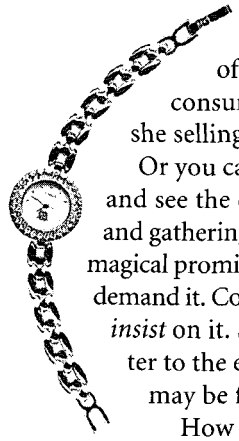
—Helen Landon Cass

Those words were spoken some years ago by a female radio announcer to a convention of salesmen in Philadelphia. *The Philadelphia Retail Ledger* for June 6, 1923, recorded Ms. Cass' invocations with no surrounding explanation. They were simply noted as a matter of record, not as a startling insight.

There are two ways to read her spiel. You can read it like a melancholy Marxist and see the barely veiled indictment

BY JAMES B. TWITCHELL

BEN FISHMAN



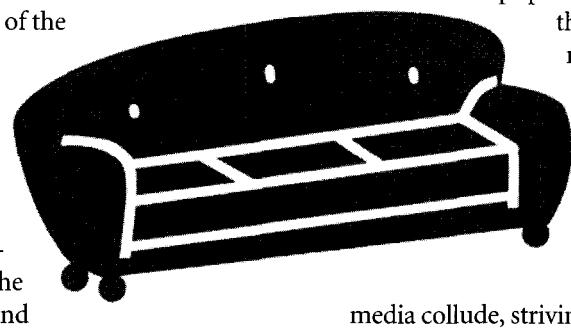
of the selling process. What does she think consumers are—dopes to be duped? What is she selling? Snake oil?

Or you can read it like an unrepentant capitalist and see the connection between consuming goods and gathering meaning. The reason producers splash magical promise over their goods is because consumers demand it. Consumers are not sold a bill of goods; they *insist* on it. Snake oil to the cynic is often holy water to the eager. What looks like exploiting desire may be fulfilling desire.

How you come down in this matter depends on your estimation of the audience. Does the audience manipulate things to make meaning, or do other people use things to manipulate the audience? Clearly, this is a variation of "I persuade, you educate, they manipulate," for both points of view are supportable. Let's split the difference and be done with it.

More interesting to me, however, is to wonder why such a statement, so challenging, so revolutionary, so provocative in many respects was, in the early 1920s, so understandable, so acceptable, even so passé that it appears with no gloss. Why is it that when you read the early descriptions of capitalism, all the current bugaboos—advertising, packaging, branding, fashion, and retailing techniques—seem so much better understood?

And why has the consumer—playing an active, albeit usually secondary, part in the consumptive dyad of earlier interpretations—become almost totally listless in our current descriptions? From Thomas Hobbes in the mid-17th century ("As in other things, so in men, not the seller but the buyer determines the price") to Edwin S. Gingham in the mid-20th century ("Consumers with dollars in their pockets are not, by any stretch of the imagination, weak. To the contrary, they are the most merciless, meanest, toughest market disciplinarians I know"), the consumer was seen as participating in the meaning-making of the material world. How and why did the consumer get dumbed down and phased out so quickly? Why has the hypodermic metaphor (false needs injected into a docile populace) become the unchallenged explanation of consumerism?



I think that much of our current refusal to consider the liberating role of consumption is the result of who has been doing the describing. Since the 1960s, the primary "readers" of the commercial "text" have been the well-tended and -tenured members of the academy. For any number of reasons—the most obvious being their low levels of disposable income, average age, and gender, and the fact that these critics are selling a competing product, high-cult (which is also coated with its own dream values)—the academy has casually passed off as "hegemonic brainwashing" what seems to me, at least, a self-evident truth about human nature: We like having stuff.

In place of the obvious, they have substituted an interpretation that they themselves often call *vulgar* Marxism. It is supposedly vulgar in the sense that it is not as sophisticated as the real stuff, but it has enough spin on it to be more appropriately called Marxism *lite*. Go into almost any cultural studies course in this country and you will hear the condemnation of consumerism expounded: What we see in the marketplace is the result of the manipulation of the many for the profit of the few. Consumers are led around by the nose. We live in a squirrel cage. Left alone we would read Wordsworth, eat lots of salad, and have meetings to discuss Really Important Subjects.

In cultural studies today, everything is oppression and we are all victims. In macrocosmic form, the oppression is economic—the "free" market. In microcosmic form, oppression is media—your "free" TV. Here, in the jargon of this downmarket Marxism, is how the system works: The manipulators, a.k.a. "the culture industry," attempt to enlarge their hegemony by establishing their ideological base in the hearts and pocketbooks of a weak and demoralized populace. Left alone, we would never desire things (ugh!). They have made us materialistic. But for them, we would be spiritual.

To these critics, the masters of industry and their henchmen, the media lords, are predators, and what they do in no way reflects or resolves genuine audience concerns. Just the opposite. The masters of the media collude, striving to infantilize us so that we are docile, anxious, and filled with "reified desire." While we may think advertising is just "talking about the product," that packaging just "wraps the object," that retailing is just "trading

Consumerism is not against our better judgment. We have not just

the product," or that fashion is just "the style of the product," this is not so. That you may think so only proves their power over you. The marginalized among us—the African American, the child, the immigrant, and especially the female—are trapped into this commodifying system, this false consciousness, and this fetishism that only the enlightened can correct. Legendary ad man David Ogilvy's observation that, "The consumer is no fool, she is your wife" is just an example of the repressive tolerance of such a sexist, materialist culture.

Needless to say, in such a system the only safe place to be is tenured, underpaid, self-defined as marginalized, teaching two days a week for nine months a year, and writing really perceptive social criticism that your colleagues can pretend to read. Or rather, you *would* be writing such articles if only you could find the time.

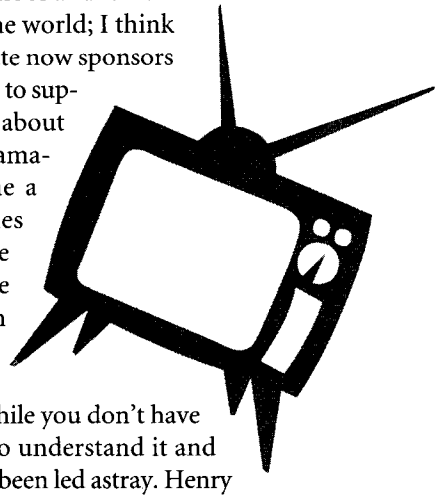
The Triumph of Stuff

The idea that consumerism creates artificial desires rests on a wistful ignorance of history and human nature, on the hazy, romantic feeling that there existed some halcyon era of noble savages with purely natural needs. Once fed and sheltered, our needs have always been cultural, not natural. Until there is some other system to codify and satisfy those needs and yearnings, capitalism—and the culture it carries with it—will continue not just to thrive but to triumph.

In the way we live now, it is simply impossible to consume objects without consuming meaning. Meaning is pumped *and* drawn everywhere throughout the modern commercial world, into the farthest reaches of space and into the smallest divisions of time. Commercialism is the water we all swim in, the air we breathe, our sunlight and shade. Currents of desire flow around objects like smoke in a wind tunnel. The complications of my Miata purchase (see "How I Bought My Miata," page 24) are the norm.

This isn't to say that I'm simply sanguine about such a material culture. It has many problems that I have glossed over. Consumerism is wasteful, it is devoid of otherworldly concerns, it lives for today and celebrates the body. It overindulges and spoils the young with impossible promises. It encourages recklessness, living beyond one's means, gambling. Consumer culture is always new, always without a past. Like religion, which it has displaced, it afflicts the comfortable and comforts the afflicted. It is heedless of the truly poor who cannot gain access to the loop of meaningful information that is carried through its ceaseless exchanges. It is a one-dimensional world, a wafer-thin world, a world low on significance and high on glitz, a world without yesterdays.

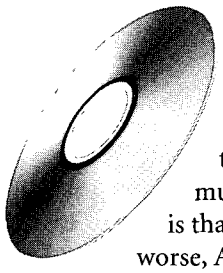
On a personal level, I struggle daily to keep it at bay. For instance, I am offended by billboards (how do they externalize costs?); I fight to keep Chris Whittle's Channel One TV and all place-based advertising from entering the classroom; political advertising makes me sick, especially the last-minute negative ads; I contribute to PBS in hopes they will stop slipping down the slope of commercialism (although I know better); I am annoyed that Coke has bought all the "pouring rights" at my school and is now trying to do the same to the world; I think it's bad enough that the state now sponsors gambling, do they also have to support deceptive advertising about it?; I despise the way that amateur athletics has become a venue for shoe companies (why not just replace the football with the Nike swoosh and be done with it?); and I just go nuts at Christmas.



But I also realize that while you don't have to like it, it doesn't hurt to understand it and our part in it. We have not been led astray. Henry Luce was not far off when he claimed in a February 1941 editorial in *Life* magazine that the next era was to be the American Century: "The Greeks, the Romans, the English and the French had their eras, and now it was ours." Not only that, but we are likely to commandeer much of the 21st century as well.

Almost a decade ago, Francis Fukuyama, a State Department official, contended in his controversial essay (and later book) "The End of History?" that "the ineluctable spread of consumerist Western culture" presages "not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution." OK, such predictions are not new. "The End of History" (as we know it) and "the end point of mankind's ideological evolution" have

judgment. It *is* our better
asked to go this way, we have *demanded* to.



been predicted before by philosophers. Hegel claimed it had already happened in 1806 when Napoleon embodied the ideals of the French Revolution, and Marx said the end was coming soon with world communism. What legitimizes this modern claim is that it is demonstrably true. For better or for worse, American commercial culture is well on its way to becoming world culture. The Soviets have fallen. Only quixotic French intellectuals and anxious Islamic fundamentalists are trying to stand up to it.

While consumerism is dreary anc doubtless it should be, it is

To some degree, the triumph of consumerism is the triumph of the popular will. You may not like what is manufactured, advertised, packaged, branded, and broadcast, but it is far closer to what most people want most of the time than at any other period of modern history.

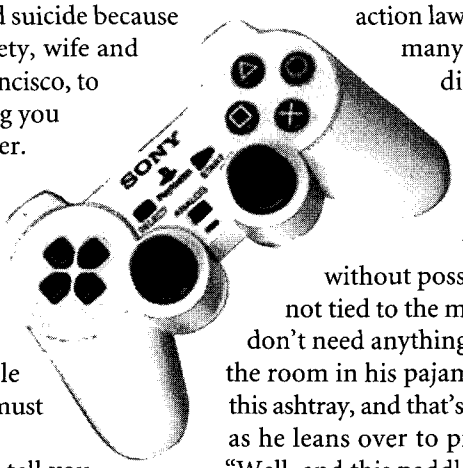
Trollope and *The Jerk*

Two fictional characters personify to me the great divide: Augustus Melmotte, the protagonist of Anthony Trollope's 19th-century novel, *The Way We Live Now*, and Navin R. Johnson, the eponymous hero of Steve Martin's 1979 movie, *The Jerk*.

Melmotte, a Jew, comes from Paris to London with his daughter and his Bohemian wife. When the action of the novel is over and Augustus has committed suicide because he cannot fit in to proper Victorian society, wife and daughter head off to America—to San Francisco, to be exact. Trollope is always exact in letting you know that geography determines character. So too we know that Ruby Ruggles and her bumpkin brother belong at Sheep's Acres Farm and that Roger Carbury should preside over Carbury Hall. Sir Felix Carbury, fallen from grace, must go to Germany—there is no room for his kind, no club that will accept him. Mrs. Hurtle comes from San Francisco and in the end must return there.

Any Trollope lover worth his salt can tell you much about the protagonists simply by such comings and goings. These paths are the code by which our grandparents recognized, in Dominick Dunne's felicitous title, those who are "people like us": our kind/not our kind. The Victorian reading public needed such shorthand because *things* had no brand personalities—manners, places, sinecures—and bloodlines did. Salaries meant little, accomplishments even less. The central acts of *The Way We Live Now* are the attempts by Augustus Melmotte to buy a titled husband for his daughter and get a named estate for himself. He can't do it, of course—how silly to try, even if he is the "City's most powerful financier." In his world, meaning was generated through such social conventions as the abstract concept of bloodline, the value of patina, your club, owning land, acceptable in-laws, your accent, the seating chart for dinner, the proper church pew—all things Melmotte could never master. It was a stultifying system—a real old-boy network, but one that to Trollope still worked. It was a system presided over by chummy squires, comfortable gentlemen, and twinkling clerics.

Compare that to the world of *The Jerk*. Here, the story is held together by the running joke that when Navin R. Johnson is being the most idiotic, he is really being the most savant. After a series of misadventures, Navin amasses a fortune by inventing a way to keep eyeglasses from slipping down the nose (the "Opti-grab"). He wins the hand of his sweetheart, buys incredibly gauche gold chains, swag lamps, outrageous golf carts, and ersatz Grecian mansions. Surrounded by things, he is finally happy. But then—curses!—he loses his possessions as a google-eyed litigant wins a class-action lawsuit because the Opti-grab has made many wearers cross-eyed. Navin's wife is distraught. She bursts into tears. "I don't care about losing the money, it's losing all this stuff."



Navin, as innocent as he is honest, says he doesn't really care about these things, he knows who he is without possessions. His sense of self is certainly not tied to the material world. "I don't want stuff...I don't need anything," he says to her as he starts to leave the room in his pajamas. He sees an old ashtray. "Except this ashtray, and that's the only thing I need is this," he says, as he leans over to pick it up. Navin walks to the door. "Well, and this paddle game and the ashtray is all I need. And this, this remote control; that's all I need, just the ashtray, paddle game, and this remote control."

Navin is growing progressively more frantic in vintage Steve Martin fashion. He is in the hall now, pajamas down around his knees and his arms full of stuff. "And these matches. Just the ashtray, paddle ball, remote control, and these matches...and this lamp, and that's all I need. I don't need one other thing...except this magazine." We hear him gathering more things as he disappears down the hall. Navin, jerk enough to think he needs nothing, is sage enough not to leave home without a few of his favorite things.

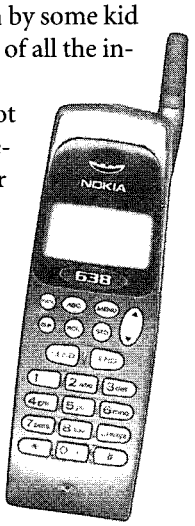
Augustus Melmotte, certified world-class financier, is forever kept at bay. He never achieves his goal and finally commits suicide. Navin R. Johnson, certified consumer jerk, achieves (if only for a while) the objects of his heart's desire. He finally becomes a bum on Skid Row, true, but a bum who at least can try it all over again. In a consumerist culture, the value-making ligatures that hold our world together come from such conventions as advertising, packaging, branding, fashion, and even shopping itself. It is a system presided over by marketers who deliver the goods and all that is carried in their wake. It is a more democratic world, a more egalitarian world, and, I think, a more interesting world.

That said, commercialism can be a stultifying system too, and wasteful. It would be nice to think that this eternally encouraging market will result in the cosmopolitanism envisioned by the Enlightenment philosophers, that a "universalism of goods" will end in a crescendo of hosannas. It would be nice to think that more and more of the poor and disenfranchised will find their ways into the cycle of increased affluence without contracting "affluenza," the "disease" of buying too much. It would be nice to think that materialism could be heroic, self-abnegating, and redemptive. It would be nice to think that greater material comforts will release us from racism, sexism, and ethnocentricism, and that the apocalypse will come as it did at the end of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound,* leaving us "Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed...Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless ...Pinnacled dim in the intense inane."

But it is more likely that the globalization of capitalism will result in the banalities of an ever-increasing, worldwide consumerist culture. Recall that Athens ceased to be a world power around 400 B.C., yet for the next three hundred years Greek culture was the culture of the world. The Age of European Exposition ended in the mid-20th century; the Age of American Markets—Yankee imperialism—is just starting to gather force. The French don't stand a chance. The Middle East is collapsing under the weight of dish antennas and Golden Arches. The untranscendent, repetitive, sensational, democratic, immediate, tribalizing, and unifying force of what Irving Kristol calls the American Imperium need not result in a Bronze Age of culture, however. In fact, who knows what this Pax Americana will result in? But it certainly will not produce what Shelley had in mind.

We have been in the global marketplace a short time, and it is an often scary and melancholy place. A butterfly flapping its wings in China may not cause storm clouds over Miami, but a few lines of computer code written by some kid in Palo Alto may indeed change the lives of all the inhabitants of Shanghai.

depressing to some, as liberating and democratic to many more.



More important, perhaps, we have not been led into this world of material closeness against our better judgment. For many of us, especially when young, consumerism is not against our better judgment. It *is* our better judgment. And this is true regardless of class or culture. We have not just asked to go this way, we have demanded. Now most of the world is lining up, pushing and shoving, eager to elbow into the mall. Woe to the government or religion that says no.

Getting and spending have been the most passionate, and often the most imaginative, endeavors of modern life. We have done more than acknowledge that the good life starts with the material life, as the ancients did. We have made stuff the dominant prerequisite of organized society. Things "R" Us. Consumption has become production. While this is dreary and depressing to some, as doubtless it should be, it is liberating and democratic to many more.

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How I Bought My Red Miata

A Personal Experience

All our wants, beyond those which a very moderate income will supply, are purely imaginary.

—Henry St. John, 1743

Things, as such, become goods as soon as the human mind recognizes them as means suitable for the promotion of human purposes.

—Carl Menger, 1871

Sometimes it is best to test academic theory against—gasp!—personal experience. When my daughters were little they would go with me to the grocery store. We would start as friends, and before a few aisles had passed we would be at each other's throats. "Gimme this, I want that, can we have these?"—it would go on and on until, by the vegetables, I would lose control and things would degenerate into Kmart Khaos. "No, no, a *thousand* nos," I would yell at them. "No, you can't have that. No, I won't buy you that." This didn't work, and by the time we had reached the checkout line, they had gotten much of what they had sought.

To stop the demoralizing defeat I tried to teach them about consumption. I developed a set of shopping axioms I fancifully called The Nerminological Laws of Consumption. The Nermies were a make-believe collection of little people with big-people problems. I drilled these so-called laws into them so that I could later say, "What Nerminological law have you just broken?" whenever they asked for anything.

Here are the rules. First, isolate the need. Do you *need* this thing or do you just *want* it? Don't let *needs* be confused with *wants*. Second, shop around. Check out the competition. Do your research. Third, can you afford this? Check current and anticipated cash flow. And last, once you have decided, can you read the instructions on how to use it properly? Why buy a toy you can't assemble?

The success of such a system was not so much that it was logical but that it took so long to go through that once they had come to the instruction part, we were out the door.

I would live to regret my explanation of what goes on in the Land of the Nermies ruled by the inexorable Nerminological Laws. It happened about 10 years ago. I bought a Mazda Miata. This is a snappy little red sports car that 12-year-old boys really like, but chubby, balding 50-year-olds usually buy. My daughters like driving it, but better, they like asking me which of the Nerminological Laws I followed when I bought it. Did I *need* a car since I biked to work? Did I need a car that seats only two? Did I really shop around? Could I afford it on my professor salary? Did I even know how to drive it properly? If so, why did I brake during cornering instead of accelerating? Could I fix it? Did I even know where the battery was hidden? Clearly, they enjoyed seeing me hoisted by my own petard.

Although this car has given me much pleasure, I still can't figure out exactly why I bought it. I know how to buy stuff. I'm fully mature. I contribute regularly to my retirement account. When I was growing up, my parents subscribed to *Consumer Reports*, and I learned how to read all the little bullseye symbols telling you if this was a good deal or a so-so one. So what happened?

I bought the car because of an advertisement. The ad itself is not complex. In fact, it is the standard "product as hero" ad that we have all seen a thousand times. There, stage center, lit from behind like a haloed angel, is this thing in your garage. If you are middle-aged, the garage is clearly from your early adolescence, when you were moving out of your room and mixing your toys with the stuff of your parents. But wait! That stuff in the pictured garage is not your dad's stuff—those are not his toys, they are yours. Dad didn't grow up with a wiffle ball, a dart board, the teddy bear, the metronome (aargh!), the dollhouse, that bike.

The maudlin text below the icon makes it clear. All this is/was yours:

"It was one of those summer evenings you wished would never end, and the whole neighborhood turned

out to see your new car. You answered a million questions, and everyone sat in the driver's seat. They went home long after sunset."

In an interesting kind of temporal dislocation the "you" is in the past tense. This is the you of your childhood, the you who rushed downtown each September to see what the new cars looked like, the you who dreamed about getting an MG, an Austin Healey 3000, or maybe a Triumph. It would be red, or maybe English racing green. When someone had a car like that what could you do but just stand there and look at it? There was really nothing you could say.

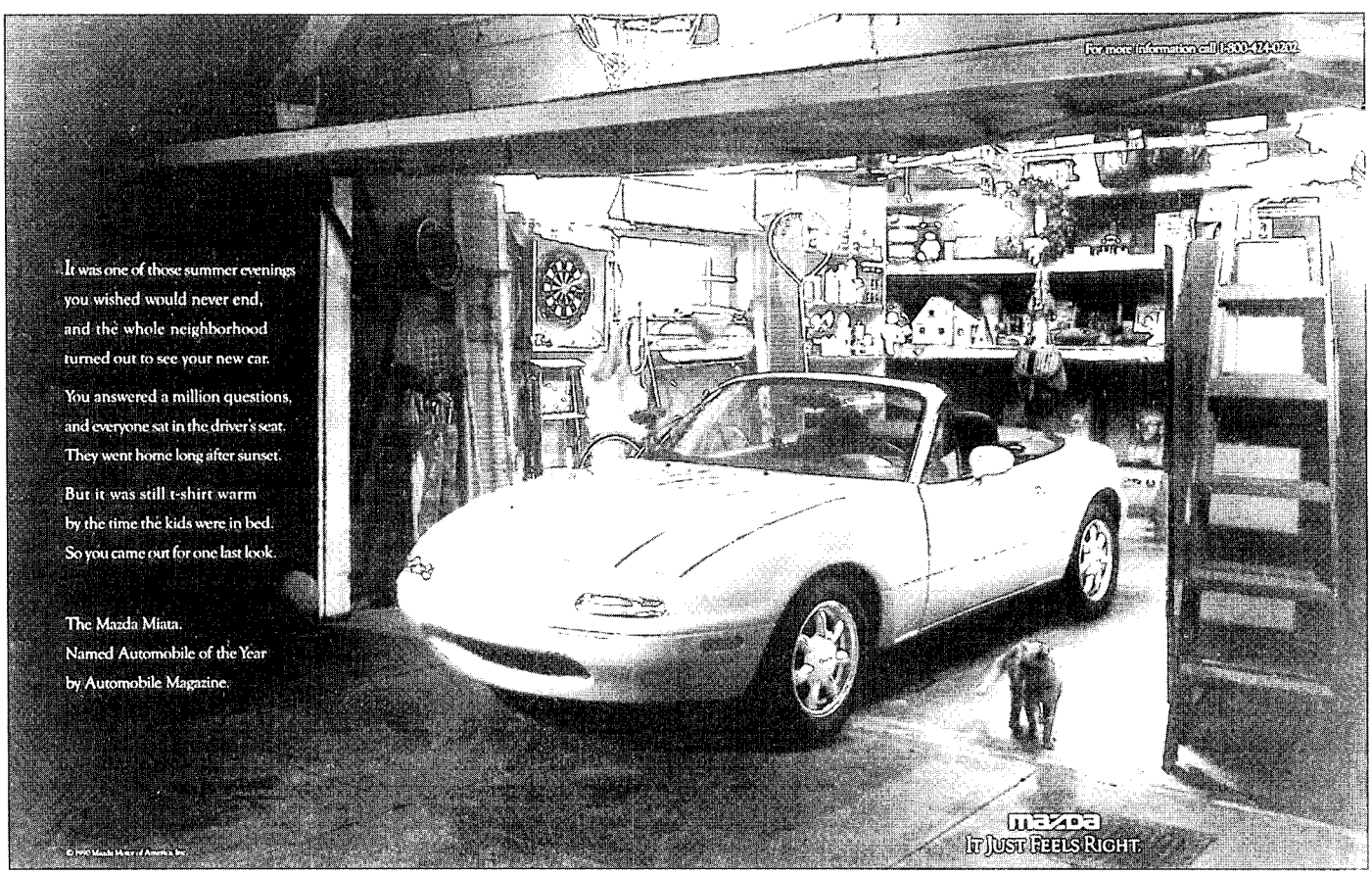
The last line in the copy pulls the plug. "But it was still T-shirt warm by the time the kids were in bed. So you came out for one last look." The "you" as observer has become the "you" as owner. It's yours now. This missing part of your past, this thing that always belonged to someone else, is yours. Little wonder the car is positioned and lit like a holy relic. It's coming at you. All you have to do is grasp it.

What separates this ad from the usual automotive pitch is its claim on memory. The more usual claim for sports cars is sexual: Get this car, get that girl. So the sports car is usually photographed out in the rugged countryside, the sport himself is young and virile, and the chick by his side just can't stop looking at him. In advertising lingo this is called the aspirational sell: Use the product and everyone will see what a real man you are.

What is important about the Miata ad is that there is no one at the wheel and no dreamy chick flapping her lashes at him. This driver's seat is vacant. You've always wanted to sit there. Now you can. Here, as my cultural studies colleagues might say, is nostalgic onanism.

Although I had "new-car fever" (a common enough strain of affluenza), the object was difficult to consume. Here's why. I teach school. I wear khaki pants. I had a green book bag in graduate school. I am a company man. I buy my cars from Volvo or Saab. Not because I like those cars—I don't. They are built to be ugly and are no fun. But they are part of the uniform. They are from Sweden, for goodness' sake, the Valhalla of academic liberalism. If I bought the Miata I was not just going to lose my affiliation with my usual consumption group, I was going over to a different group, to a group I abhorred. If I bought this car I was going to become ...a yuppie!

At the time I was making my decision (in the early 1990s), yuppies were the group du jour of marketers and the group de resistance for all the rest of us. The original definition was a "young urban professional," but at some point this became corrupted to mean a


It was one of those summer evenings
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So you came out for one last look.
The Mazda Miata.
Named Automobile of the Year
by Automobile Magazine.
mazda
It Just Feels Right.

"young upwardly mobile professional." From there the meaning spread to define an entire generation of affluent and selfish 20-somethings who were hot on the heels of us baby boomers. Demographically, yuppies were part of the 76 million people born between 1946 and 1964. Their number was small. Indeed, the only definitive estimate of the yuppie population, published in *American Demographics* in 1985, found just 4 million of them, representing a mere 5 percent of late baby boomers. But their impact on the rest of us was huge—reverse magnetism.

Yuppies were disgusting. What made them disgusting was their lack of reticence in the displaying of commercial badges. More interesting still was that no one ever would admit to being one of them. In fact, in retrospect, the real sign of being a yuppie was that you tried hard to disassociate from them while all along displaying their badges.

Yuppies were unique in that they were the first consumption community that I can think of known *only* by their badges. No one came forward like Marlon Brando, Abbie Hoffman, John Wayne, or Elton John to personify the group. Richard Gere laying out his clothes on the bed in the 1980 movie *American Gigolo* might have been the yuppie archetype, but he seemed a little too moody about his stuff. Still, rather like Eagle Scouts, yuppies had no distinct personality other than their merit (or *demerit,* it's up to you) badges worn almost Pancho Villa style around their vacuous lifestyles.

Here are just a few of the yuppie badges: yellow ties and red suspenders, Merlot, marinated salmon steaks, green-bottle beer, Club Med vacations, stuff with ducks on it, Gaggenau stoves, Sub-Zero refrigerators, latte, clothing from Ann Taylor or Ralph Lauren, designer water, Filofax binders, Cuisinarts, kiwi fruit, Ben & Jerry's ice cream, ventless Italian suits, pasta makers, bread makers, espresso-cappuccino makers, cell phones, home fax machines, air and water cleaners, laptop computers, exercise machines, massage tables, and remote controls for the television, the VCR, the CD player, the stereo receiver, the garage door, the child. More than anything, of course, the car—especially the BMW, the infamous beemer—was the yuppie badge nonpareil.

The yuppie and his German or Japanese car were academic anathema. If a colleague were to see me in such a car he would surely think I had gone over to the other side. My cousin with the pricy condo, the Jenn-Air gas grill, Biggest Bertha Ever golf club, and the Suburban could be a yuppie. But not me. I only bought just the things I absolutely needed...like a red Miata? And that, of course, was precisely my problem. When I bought this car, I became one of them.

I dilate on my Miata decision because it shows the dynamic of pressures in the commercial world. Two generations ago maybe choosing what denomination of the Congregational church to attend would have caused me such distress. Do I dare be seen with Unitarians? At the turn of this century what musical instrument you played would have been important. "They laughed when I sat down at the piano, but when I started to play!" describes a Horatio Alger experience we have trouble understanding. Maybe status would have been derived from what I read. Could I be seen reading Walt Whitman? What about what I ate? Our grandparents read etiquette books detailing the shame you should feel if you ordered the same meal too often. "Again she orders—A chicken salad, please!" is the headline of an ad for such an etiquette book. It is presumably spoken by an exasperated young man about his date. What if I coughed? Would that be a social blunder?

While I certainly went through the modern version of the "agonies of the damned" buying a Japanese internal-combustion engine advertised through nostalgia and wrapped in red plastic, I never once was duped, misled, waylaid, or reified.

Perhaps what I wore. Could I be seen wearing a gold stickpin in my tie? The way we live now, I worry that I might be mistaken for a yuppie.

While I certainly went through the modern version of the "agonies of the damned" buying a Japanese internal-combustion engine advertised through nostalgia and wrapped in red plastic, I never once was duped, misled, waylaid, or reified. In fact, I loved the process. They offered me my dream and I gladly bought it. I never liked that dreary Volvo to begin with. Now I'm wondering about a Jaguar, perhaps something from the early '80s, not too ostentatious but still flashy, if you know what I mean.

—James B. Twitchell

BIO INVADERS!

Are we under attack by "non-native" species? Should we care?

By Ronald Bailey

"That kind of information is dangerous," scolded Jodi Cassell. Cassell, who works with the California Sea Grant Extension program, was speaking at a symposium on "Alien Species in Coastal Waters: What Are the Real Ecological and Social Costs?" at the February American Association for the Advancement of Science meeting in Washington, D.C. She wasn't alone in her alarm. "We have members of the press here," warned a member of the audience. "I am very concerned that they might think that his view is the dominant view."

The target of this shushing was Mark Sagoff, a philosopher from the University of Maryland who has worked with Maryland's Sea Grant program to determine how the Chesapeake Bay's unique ecology defines a sense of place. Sagoff's sin? He'd had the temerity to point out the benefits that the much-loathed zebra mussels had brought to the Great Lakes.

Introduced via discharged ballast water from European freighters in the mid-1980s, zebra mussel populations have been exploding in the Great Lakes. Tens of thousands of the tiny, striped shellfish can occupy a square meter of any hard surface—like rocks, docks, and boat hulls. Observers initially feared that zebra mussels would clog water-intake pipes for municipalities and power plants and perhaps out-compete native shellfish for food. However, it turns out that the things are voracious "filter feeders." They strain algae and nutrients like fertilizer runoff from the lakes' waters. As a result, zebra mussels have played a significant role in improving water quality by clearing the lakes of polluting organic matter.

"There has been a striking difference in water clarity improving dramatically in Lake Erie, sometimes six to four times what it was before the arrival of the zebra mussels," according to the U.S. Geological Survey's Nonindigenous Aquatic Species Database. "With this increase in water clarity, more light is able to penetrate deeper allowing for an increase in macrophytes (aquatic plants). Some of these macrophyte beds have not been seen for many decades due to changing conditions of the lake mostly due to pollution. The macrophyte beds that have returned are providing cover and acting as nurseries for some species of fish." What's more, zebra mussels provide food and habitat for all sorts of native fish and ducks.

Having Sagoff point out such positive developments was more than his colleagues on the AAAS panel could bear. To them—and to most professional ecologists—zebra mussels are simply "bad." So too, say ecologists, are all other "non-native" or "invader" species that set up shop in ecosytems different from the ones in which they originated.

Why ecologists feel this way is no small matter. It is one of the hottest questions in contemporary ecology, and one which has tremendous policy implications: Should massive regulatory steps be taken to make sure "non-native species" are kept out of any given ecosystem? This is the same issue that the signatories to the Convention on Biological Diversity are hashing out in Nairobi, Kenya, as this issue goes to print. The convention, an international agreement negotiated during the 1992 Earth Summit, is the first comprehensive global treaty to address all aspects of biological diversity, including genetic resources, species, and ecosystems. The results from Nairobi could well be the start of a global system for controlling non-native species. Delegates from 168 countries, including the U.S. (which has signed but not ratified the convention), are considering the "Guidelines for the Prevention of Biodiversity Loss Caused by Alien Invasive Species" devised by the World Conservation Union earlier this year.

Among other things, these guidelines want to apply the very problematic "precautionary principle" to the introduction of alien species. (See "Precautionary Tale," April 1999.) The WCU provisions call for sanctions against people or companies that intentionally introduce species without the prior authorization of national "biosecurity" agencies. They further recommend establishing "appropriate fines, penalties or other sanctions to apply to those responsible for unintentional introductions through negligence and bad practice." The activities of transport companies would "be subjected to appropriate levels of monitoring and control" by the biosecurity bureaucracies. In other words, a decision to regulate non-native species will likely end up regulating international trade, too.

The two basic positions regarding the debate over non-native species were laid out in clear relief at the AAAS meeting. So were the essentially aesthetic underpinnings of those who would devote huge resources to keeping "invaders" out of a given ecosystem. Panelist David Pimentel, an ecologist at Cornell, estimated that efforts to clear zebra mussels from municipal and city water-intake pipes, boat hulls, and docks cost about $200 million a year. Pimentel noted that he and his colleagues have "conservatively" estimated that the 50,000 non-native species introduced into this continent were costing the American economy $137 billion per year. Jodi Cassell and like-minded audience members were clearly worried that if the Sagoffs of the world go around talking about the benefits as well as the costs of non-native species, they might undermine efforts to extirpate invader species from our shores.

Sagoff countered by pointing out that even Pimentel admits that the vast majority of introduced species do not have adverse costs. Pimentel's "50,000" is just a big scare number, noted Sagoff. "Besides, more than 60 percent of insect pests are native. So why single out non-natives in toting up the costs?"

There's another important point worth making on behalf of the invaders: We have reaped enormous benefits from non-native species. Ninety-nine percent of crop plants in the United States are non-native, as are all our livestock except the turkey. "There is no basis in either economic or ecological theory for preferring native species over non-native species," said Sagoff. He further challenged his fellow panelists to name any specifically ecological criterion by which scientists can objectively determine whether an ecosystem whose history they don't know has been invaded or not. Are invaded ecosystems less productive? No. Are they less species-rich? No. And so on. Tellingly, the panelists had to agree that there is no objective criterion for distinguishing between "disturbed" ecosystems and allegedly pristine ones.

Despite that inability, the Convention on Biological Diversity's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical, and Technological Advice stipulated last year that "it is important to differentiate between natural invasions and human introductions of species."

Why? From a strictly ecological point of view, should we care whether a species arrives on a piece of driftwood or on a cargo boat? Why not just regard the introduction of non-native species as fascinating experiments? *Science* magazine estimated last year that 99 percent of all the biomass—that is, the total of all living matter—in some parts of the San Francisco Bay belongs to non-native species. Yet native species continue to live in the Bay. University of California at Davis evolutionary biologist Geerat Vermeij concluded in a 1991 *Science* article: "Invasion usually results in the enrichment of biotas [the total flora and fauna] of continents and oceans." In layman's terms, introducing species tends to raise the total number of species living in a given ecosystem, not decrease it.

Most recorded extinctions are of species confined to oceanic islands which cannot compete with introduced continental species or humanity's habitat changes. For example, the brown tree snake came to Guam from New Guinea or the Solomon Islands during World War II. (They apparently hitched a ride on either Allied or Japanese ships or planes.) The birds and lizards of Guam were not adapted to snake predators and so were decimated by this alien species. However, continental species are better able to weather invasions. Even the Convention on Biological Diversity's Subsidiary Body concedes, "There are no records of global extinction of a continental species as a result of invasive species."

Of course, that isn't to say that non-native species don't sometimes cause economic harm. Take the case of the American chestnut. There was a time when it was said that an enterprising squirrel could travel from Maine to Georgia on the interlocking branches of chestnut trees. Yet an introduced fungus killed off nearly all of them before 1950.

The loss of American chestnuts was economically damaging, but the *ecological* costs are much less clear. The disappearance of such a dominant tree species from the Appalachians might have been expected to have had far more major consequences for the survival of other species in the ecosystem than it apparently has had. If the fungus had arrived before European settlers, it is unlikely that the absence of chestnuts would even have been noted.

On the other hand, James Kirkley, a biologist at the Virginia Institute for Marine Sciences, once told me that he would be happy to seed the Chesapeake Bay with Asian oysters. Why? Because overfishing and two fierce diseases have decimated native oysters so that oyster populations are less than 1 percent of their original levels. As a result, Chesapeake Bay waters have become much murkier. Asian oysters are very similar to native ones but resist disease more successfully. "The worst thing that could happen is that the Asian oysters would spread like wildfire," said the biologist. "Which is exactly what we would want them to do." In this case a non-native species would be filling an ecological niche that has been opened by disease.

Acknowledging the potential benefits of non-native species doesn't necessarily preclude efforts to regulate them—or local species, for that matter. Even Sagoff argues that "good reasons exist for controlling known pests, whether native or exotic. Good reasons exist for taking pride in local flora and fauna." As he told me in an interview, "No good reason, economic or ecological, can be given, however, for waging an expensive battle against exotic species as such."

The preference for native over non-native species is essentially "a religious one," says Sagoff. That doesn't mean it isn't valid, but it does mean that ecologists and environmentalists can't simply justify their preference for native species on the basis of economic fiddling that willy-nilly lumps together basically benign alien species along with bad actors. Nor should ecologists attempt to justify their prejudices through recourse to "objective" science. An argument against alien species "must be explicitly an aesthetic one or historical one," he says. "Ecology should not attempt to become a normative science."

Ecology will not and cannot tell us which landscape is "better" or should be favored.

Arguments over which landscapes are to be preferred are at the heart of a lot of political and environmental debates today: suburban development vs. greenbelts; old-growth forests vs. forests managed for logging; wetlands vs. farmland, etc. They should be recognized for what they are and debated on their proper terms, as value judgments that are rooted not in science, but in aesthetics. The fact is that tastes vary. Some people love to look at fields of amber grain and to hear the gentle lowing of cows in a barn. Others prefer prairie grasses dotted with wildflowers and the rude huffing sounds of bison. Ecology will not and cannot tell us which landscape is "better" or should be favored. The most beautiful landscape or ecosystem, like beauty itself, is in the eye of the beholder.

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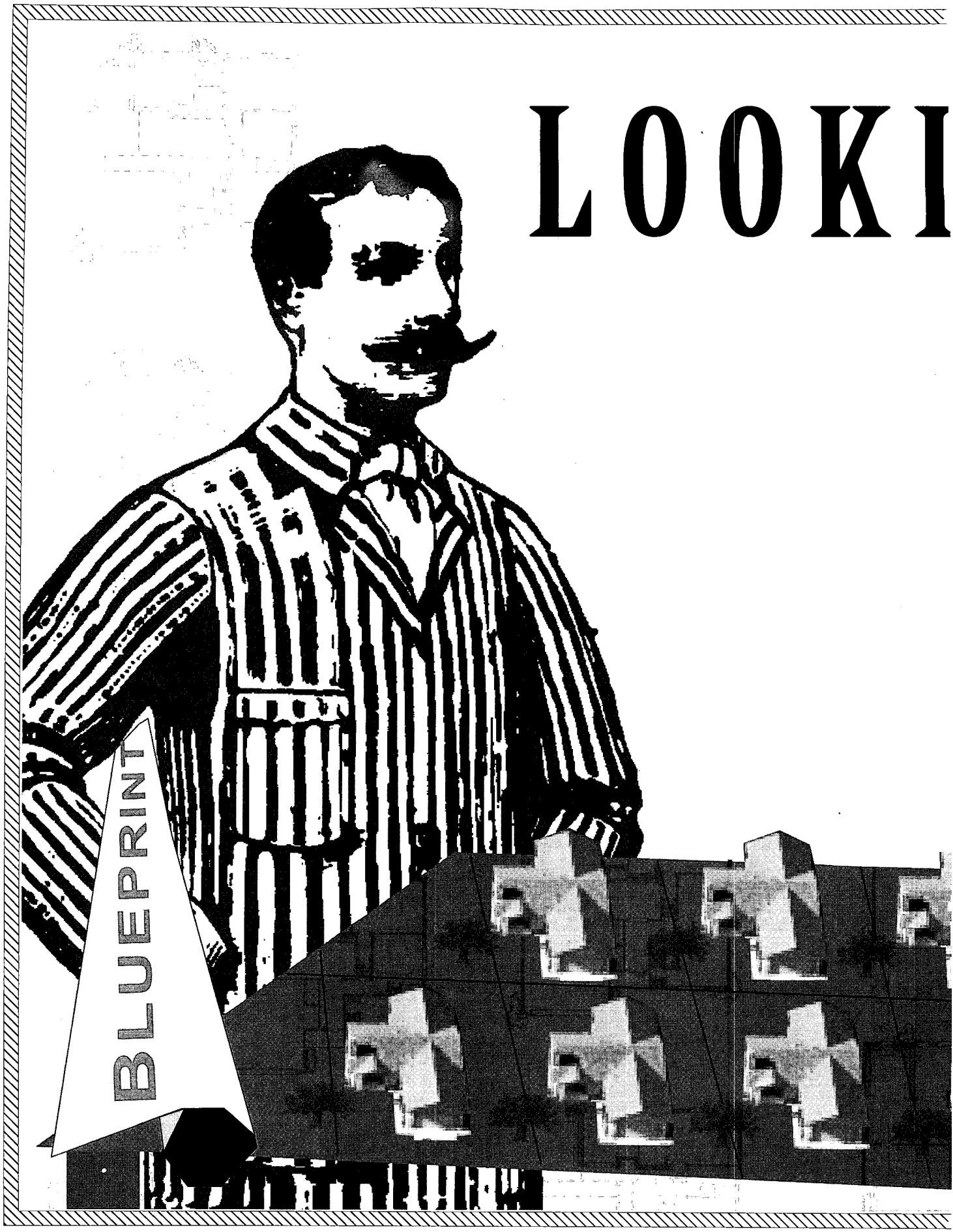


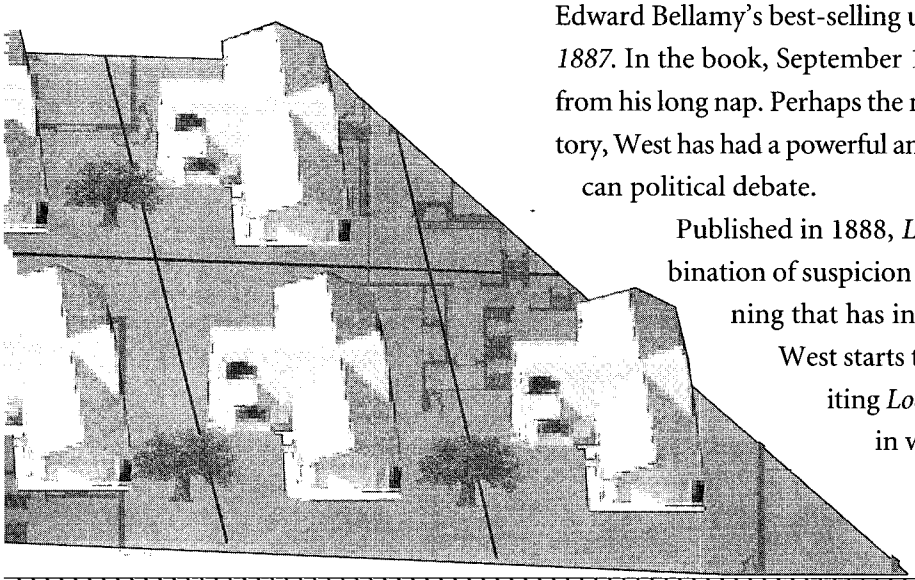
MARIA KNIER

NG BACK at *Looking Backward*

Edward Bellamy's famous utopian novel is set in today's America. Are we living his crazy dream? • By Tom Peyser

On Memorial Day in 1887, Julian West, one of the best-known Americans of his day and a notorious insomniac, sought help for his chronic sleep problems. In the course of his treatment by a Boston doctor, however, West was "mesmerized" so effectively that he never regained consciousness; he has remained in a state of suspended animation for more than 100 years.

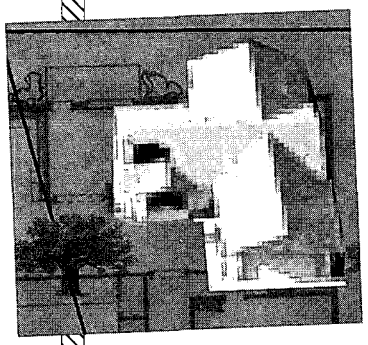
This September, it is all but certain that West will awaken from his slumber and be brought back to life. To be sure, this amazing triumph is not a scientific marvel but a literary one: West is the protagonist of Edward Bellamy's best-selling utopian novel, *Looking Backward: 2000–1887.* In the book, September 10, 2000, is the precise day West rouses from his long nap. Perhaps the most famous time traveler in literary history, West has had a powerful and enduring effect on the terms of American political debate.



Published in 1888, *Looking Backward* crystallized that combination of suspicion of markets and love of centralized planning that has in various forms persisted to this day. As West starts to rustle in his bed, it is well worth revisiting *Looking Backward* and teasing out the ways in which it continues to influence contemporary times.

Bellamy's vision of a future without capitalism proved immensely appealing. It took the massive hit novel *Ben-Hur* (1880) seven years to rack up the sales that *Looking Backward* tallied in just two. By the early 1890s, more than 150 "Bellamy Clubs," devoted to discussing and implementing the ideas in *Looking Backward*, had sprung up in cities across the United States. Translated into 20 foreign languages, the novel was a hot topic among the intelligentsia in pre-revolutionary Russia (Lenin's wife gave it a mixed review) and the architects of the New Deal (Arthur Morgan, the first head of the Tennessee Valley Authority, wrote a gushing 400-page biography of Bellamy). By the early '30s, Bellamy's fans had been absorbed into American socialist circles and Franklin Roosevelt's brain trust; both John Dewey and the historian Charles Beard announced that, among books published in the preceding 50 years, *Looking Backward* was matched in influence only by *Das Kapital*. They meant it as a compliment.

The basic structure of the society Bellamy imagined is easily summarized: The state runs everything and has converted the nation into a sumptuous barracks. An embittered West Point reject, Bellamy (1850–1898) cultivated a lifelong passion for the Prussian military. On his deathbed, he wiled away the hours by arranging tin soldiers along the folds of his coverlet. As enlistees in the state's "industrial army," all citizens in his utopia draw the same annual salary in the form of a "credit card" in which holes are punched to register purchases. The men march in mass rallies designed to encourage solidarity with the nation as a whole, which has become "a family, a vital union, a common life," or more succinctly, "truly a fatherland." Meanwhile the women carefully determine which men are the best workers, with an eye to bestowing their persons upon the diligent. Everyone is rich. Everyone is happy. And why shouldn't they be? Instead of "wasteful" market competition—which also encouraged each man to think of his brother as a potential enemy—a small group of bureaucrats regulates the whole economy, which is "so direct and simple in its working" that "the functionaries at Washington to whom it is trusted require to be nothing more than men of fair abilities."



As this summary makes obvious, in many respects the novel is a period piece, the distillation of what may have been the golden age of American crackpots, whose theories still get treated with respect by many noneconomists. This was a time when the likes of Henry George could be widely hailed as something like a messiah for his astonishing notion that income deriving from rent should be taxed at a rate of 100 percent. (Last fall's scandalously bad PBS documentary on New York City, where George ran unsuccessfully for mayor, declared him a "brilliant" social theorist.)

Bellamy's legacy is surprisingly robust. His novel gave socialism a new audience among America's middle classes. Before the novel was published, the educated and elite in America tended to associate the word *socialism* with a word like *tuberculosis*; both rippled with sinister hints of strange sexual liberties. Well aware of such prejudices, Bellamy concocted a future that is in every respect socialist but from which the word *socialism* has been banned. While Americans still tend not to like the sound of this word, Bellamy's readers discovered that they were very fond of the *thing*. More than any other book, *Looking Backward* made it respectable for a time to talk about implementing straightforwardly socialist schemes in the United States.

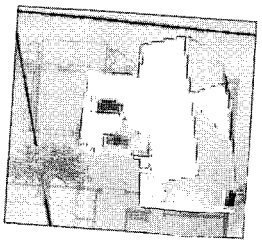
Today, of course, few in the mainstream are attracted to Bellamy's kind of authoritarian socialism. What, then, survives today of *Looking Backward*'s outmoded vision? Bellamy's chief legacy relates to his emotional attachment to planning as a good in and of itself. Irrational devotion to the inherent rightness of large-scale planning is one of the chief features of the 20th-century mind, and although Bellamy certainly was not the first to feel this devotion—it is an ancient faith—he was one of those who helped to give this faith its recognizably modern form.

Along with many others, Bellamy laid the foundations for what could be called our planning culture. Of course, to say that a preference for planning, like a preference for curry or baseball, has something to do with culture is already to resist the ideology of the plan. The plan must almost of necessity present itself as something beyond culture; the plan is rational, whereas culture is a messy, unorganized (because unplanned) tangle of prejudices. The idea that a firewall insulates the plan from anything like a cultural prejudice is perhaps the fundamental fallacy trumpeted by the planners.

Thus that exemplary planner, the Swiss architect Le Corbusier, proclaimed the following on the title page of *The Radiant City*, his 1933 magnum opus laying out an ideal city that would create all the conditions necessary for human happiness: "Plans are the rational and poetic monument set up in the midst of contingencies. Contingencies are the environment: places, peoples, cultures, topographies, climates." Lumping culture with the weather as just one of those things against which the plan must contend, "Le Corbu" assures us that the desire to control every last detail of life in the city is itself untainted by anything irrational—that is, by anything cultural. Skeptics, on the other hand, might wonder if it is entirely by chance that a man given to such views should emerge from the homeland of the watch.

It might be well to ask just what aspects of the prejudice in favor of planning are most immune to counterarguments based upon reason. Bellamy's *Looking Backward* is a good

place to look for clues, since it is not clear that the book appealed to readers because of its passages laying out Bellamy's bizarre economic *pensées.* (At one point, for instance, he suggests that competitive entrepreneurship hinders innovation, while bureaucracy fosters it.) Indeed, when Bellamy brought out a fat sequel that laid out his economic musings in a more apparently systematic form, it laid an egg.



It may be, in fact, that the appeal of *Looking Backward* depended more on aesthetics than economics. Bellamy, in common with other planners, justifies his plans at least partially on aesthetic grounds. Utopian planners concern themselves with wholes—whole societies or, for the more humble, just whole cities—that are far too complex to be fully present in all of their details to an individual mind. In other words, no matter how full an account of such a society or city is given, it cannot constitute a unified object of knowledge. Such wholes can, however, be grasped aesthetically, just as one can experience aesthetic satisfaction when contemplating, say, the whole of *Middlemarch* without having all its details before one's mind at the same time.

Since such plans are inevitably package deals, requiring the total implementation of a comprehensive order whose details cannot be grasped all at once by the intellect, utopians often present us with aesthetically satisfying vistas. These vistas are supposed to make palpable the harmonious coordination of all human action that the planner may expound upon elsewhere in more technical and abstract, but less immediately appealing, ways.

Thus Julian West passes through an important stage in his conversion to socialist principles when he ascends a rooftop to survey the city as a whole: "At my feet lay a great city. Miles of broad streets, shaded by trees and lined with fine buildings, for the most part not in continuous blocks but set in larger inclosures, stretched in every direction. Every quarter contained large open squares filled with trees, among which statues glistened and fountains flashed in the late afternoon sun. Public buildings of a colossal size and an architectural grandeur unparalleled in my day raised their stately piles on every side." Reading passages like this, one realizes that what Bellamy didn't know about government building projects would fill the one that has actually come to dominate Boston in 2000, the Big Dig.

Although the eye can compose an aesthetic whole even out of cities that do not betray any sign of having been systematically designed—Wordsworth's "Composed upon Westminster Bridge" and El Greco's "View of Toledo" are two famous instances—what is being sold by Bellamy is the pleasure of coordinated design itself, the kind of experience offered by communities like Seaside, Florida, where much of Peter Weir's 1998 movie *The Truman Show* was filmed. The fact that everything is plural—"fine buildings," "open squares," "broad streets"—draws our attention to the managed rhythms made possible only by the plan, and not to any *particular* streets, squares, or buildings. When West dreams that he has returned to 19th-century Boston, one is not surprised to find him almost retching when confronted with the uncoordinated hubbub and "malodorousness" of the town.

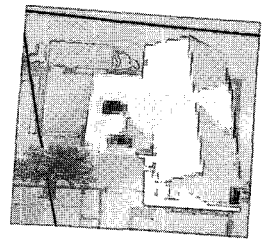
It is instructive, however, to compare West's discomfort with apparent disorder to the very different assessment of such jumbles offered in our time by Peter Blake, an architectural critic skeptical of modernist planners like Le Corbusier. Demonstrating an appreciation for the ostensible chaos of an especially bustling commercial street in New Delhi, he writes, "It wasn't designed by anybody in particular. It just happened....It is a totally disorganized and frenetic mess....By even the most modest standards of urban design, nothing—nothing whatsoever—even remotely works... except life itself. For this is precisely the heart of the city."

Bellamy's chief legacy relates to his emotional attachment to planning as a good in and of itself. Along with many others, he laid the foundations for what could be called our planning culture.

For Bellamy, however, a messy heart means a sick polity, suggesting a link between his aesthetic preference for regularity in city design and his political assumptions. By trying to inspire a revulsion at forms that do not display conscious design, Bellamy is attempting to teach a political lesson that is unmistakable, and whose ramifications are far-reaching. For just as Bellamy would have us feel that the plan makes for peace and beauty where there was only ugliness and chaos before, so does he also seem to believe that the complexity of the modern world is precisely what requires that it be planned.

This error, which has played a distinguished part in so much of the man-made suffering of the 20th century, is en-

dorsed in *Looking Backward* by Dr. Leete, Bellamy's mouthpiece. Leete describes the system of private enterprise and market exchange in the following terms: "No mode more wasteful for utilizing human energy could be devised, and for the credit of the human intellect it should be remembered that the system never was devised, but was merely a survival from rude ages when the lack of social organization made any sort of cooperation impossible." In addition to its many errors, this passage does contain one of the points that Bellamy got half-right: The market system is *not* the result of deliberate design. What Bellamy gets wrong is his association of lack of design with blundering inefficiency and chaos. He seems not even to conceive of the possibility that something can serve a useful purpose without having been deliberately invented to do so.



The fact that the new system has been consciously designed thus counts for Bellamy as an automatic mark in its favor, but his preference for clear-cut order rather than bewildering complexity—like a preference for Piet Mondrian rather than Jackson Pollock—may depend on the faculty of taste, which is notoriously immune to the conclusions of reason. The bazaar in New Delhi may have "just happened," but something like the mass rallies in *Looking Backward* cannot just happen; they must be planned. And if you have in your heart—as did Bellamy—the feeling that such rallies are beautiful, and that the hustle and bustle of spontaneous human activity is disgusting, you may find yourself casting about for a political order that will make rallies routine while outlawing jumbles.

Master planners—even if they could manage to overcome all impediments and achieve their aims—would end up clearing a space not for liberated humanity but for the kind of human being envisioned by and at home in a culture of planning.

In his brilliant obituary of one Sandor Needleman (a fictionalized version of Martin Heidegger), Woody Allen writes, "He was charmed by the National Socialist's philosophy of power, or as Needleman put it, 'I have the kind of eyes that are set off by a brown shirt.'" The degree to which political stances derive from aesthetic preferences cannot be measured with precision, but the presence of such preferences may account for the invulnerability of certain ideologies to rational attack. Molotov may have been at his most profound when, in the finest bon mot to emerge from the Hitler-Stalin Pact, he breezily quipped, "Fascism is a matter of taste."

So, increasingly, are many matters of public policy, in part because of Bellamy's surprisingly direct influence on current debates about urban design. One of Bellamy's early disciples was the British planner and architect Ebenezer Howard. He loved *Looking Backward*, and in order to realize its goals, albeit on a more modest scale than his master envisioned, he invented the idea of the "garden city" in the 1890s. For this, many revered him as a forerunner of the now voguish ideas known collectively as "the New Urbanism," the anti-sprawl movement that is best understood as the latest incarnation of Bellamy-tinged thinking to captivate proponents of government intervention in the market. (See "Dense Thinkers, January 1999.) Just why candidates for high office should suddenly find themselves engrossed by curb cuts, side-street traffic patterns, and that threat to national security, the strip mall, is not hard to guess: As enthusiasm for overt economic planning becomes harder to maintain in the face of its repeated failures, governments may be counted on to turn more and more to questions of urban planning in order to preserve the scope of their own prerogatives.

The New Urbanism has the unusual distinction—among theories of urban design, that is—of having been subjected to a hyperbolic satire in *The Truman Show.* Although the film has been received as a critique of the media—and it is that—television and the environment created by the New Urbanism function in the film as metaphors for each other, especially in the way that both work to erode the distinction between the unregulated world of private life and the requirements of the community.

In his essay "Planning the American Dream," which appears in the movement's most significant collection of manifestos, Peter Katz's *The New Urbanism: Toward an Architecture of Community* (1994), Todd W. Bressi explains that the New Urbanism is based on one simple principle: "Community planning and design must assert the importance of public over private values." Very similar sentiments are voiced in the film by the actress playing Truman's wife. In an interview publicizing the show, she explains that there is nothing degrading about living her life on camera, since, "For me, there is no difference between the public life and the private

life." She would be right at home in *Looking Backward*, whose characters never tire of explaining that they cannot even conceive of themselves except as part of the organic "fatherland."

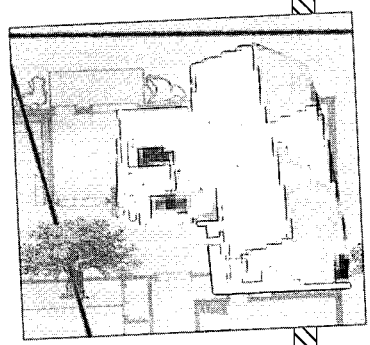
Indeed, the avowed aim of the New Urbanism is to enhance the individual's awareness of, and commitment to, the public, so that the individual will not hesitate "to assert the importance of public over private values." As is the case with Bellamy, the argument for adopting such priorities has to be made with freewheeling assertions about issues we cannot begin to talk about rationally. Thus Bellamy assures us that to rely for one's paycheck upon another individual produces a sense of degradation, but to receive it directly from a government agency is satisfaction itself. Who knew?

Similarly, advocates of the New Urbanism frequently tell us that to be in one's car or alone at home is to experience disquieting feelings of isolation and alienation. However, to present oneself for recognition by fellow citizens in a structured and heavily regulated marketplace is to be taught an ennobling lesson about, in Bressi's words, "desperately needed civic responsibility," a responsibility that will find expression in calls for "additional government initiatives." When one reads such assertions presented not as articles of faith—which they are—but as the straightforward conclusions of reason, one begins to appreciate how *The Truman Show* turns the spruce, inviting public spaces of the New Urbanism into symbols of paranoid dread and tyrannical surveillance.

Like *Looking Backward*, the New Urbanism ultimately aims at fashioning a streamlined and frictionless kind of human being, one who could not possibly offend the neighbors—or be meaningfully distinguished from them: Nietzsche's Last Man, but with a special fondness for latte and trolleys.

The desperate need for such communal characters runs through New Urbanist writing. Consider, for example, Ray Oldenburg's essay "Prospects for Community," appended to a book celebrating Seaside, Florida. "So pronounced has been the shift towards privatized lifestyles that the American dream has been sorely reshaped," writes Oldenburg. "Gone...is the ideal of community so crucial to our establishment as a nation and so essential to our predecessors' well-being and contentment." Whether this is good history is certainly open to question; the predecessors alluded to were the same people in whose faces Henry David Thoreau thought he read the signs of quiet desperation. It is certainly true, as Oldenburg states, that "the decline of community has been a perennial theme in American social commentary for most of this century." But in part that would seem to be not a sign of American thinkers' centuries-long commitment to what Oldenburg calls community, but because so many 20th-century thinkers, following in Bellamy's footsteps, have abandoned the traditional American ambivalence toward such community. As intellectuals became more and more convinced of the virtues of communalism, naturally American society, in which the individual is protected from the community to an unusual degree, started to look worse and worse.

The continuity that *is* reflected in the works of many recent American intellectuals points us to the robust tradition of European disdain for the relatively unregulated character of our society and manners. Hence Oldenburg approvingly quotes a Frenchman with little understanding of or taste for American life, Jean-Paul Sartre, to whom it seemed that Americans "are dying of loneliness." Just how to tell whether one society has more "community" or "loneliness" in it than another is unclear. What is clear, however, is that laments concerning the decline of community have at least something to do with a mounting hostility toward the idea that individuals should be exposed only to a minimum of interference from communally sanctioned power. The belief in the goodness of that power, of course, is a necessary feature of our planning culture—planners cannot carry out their plans without it.



What we should take away from Bellamy's and his descendants' enthusiasm for planning is this: that the desire to lay out comprehensive plans for the future is itself an expression of cultural preferences, not reason, and that such plans themselves will necessarily embody the limited range of culturally sanctioned values that make planning seem attractive. It is not the limitation per se in plans that should concern us. Culture inescapably *is* limitation: It allows us to become *something* only by keeping us from becoming everything else. That is why no child on Earth today will grow up with the character and habits of an Aztec priest, a Renaissance Florentine, or a Ptolemaic Egyptian.

But what we must remember is that master planners—even if they could manage to overcome all impediments and achieve their aims—would end up clearing a space not for liberated humanity but for the kind of human being envisioned by and at home in a culture of planning. Of that culture in its modern form, Edward Bellamy deserves to be considered a founding father and *Looking Backward* a founding document.

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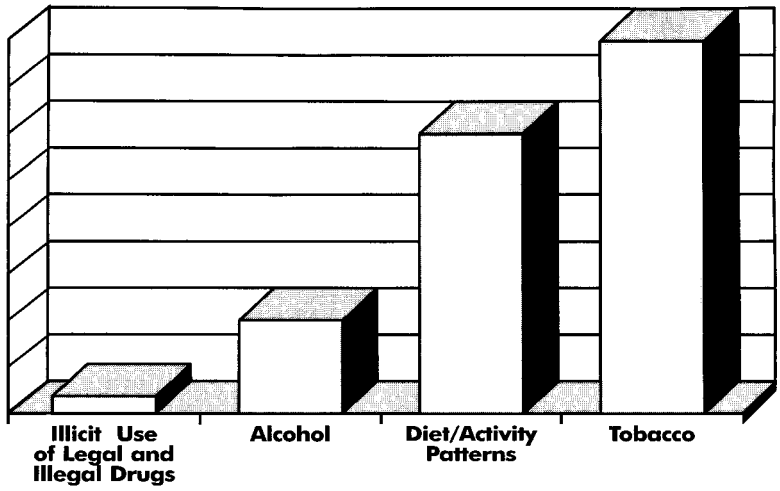
Let's Keep America's Drug Problem in Perspective

Estimated Causes of Preventable Deaths*



- 5 times as many people die from Alcohol each year than from illicit drugs and misuse of legal pharmaceuticals
- 15 times as many people die from poor diets and activity patterns
- 20 times as many people die from tobacco

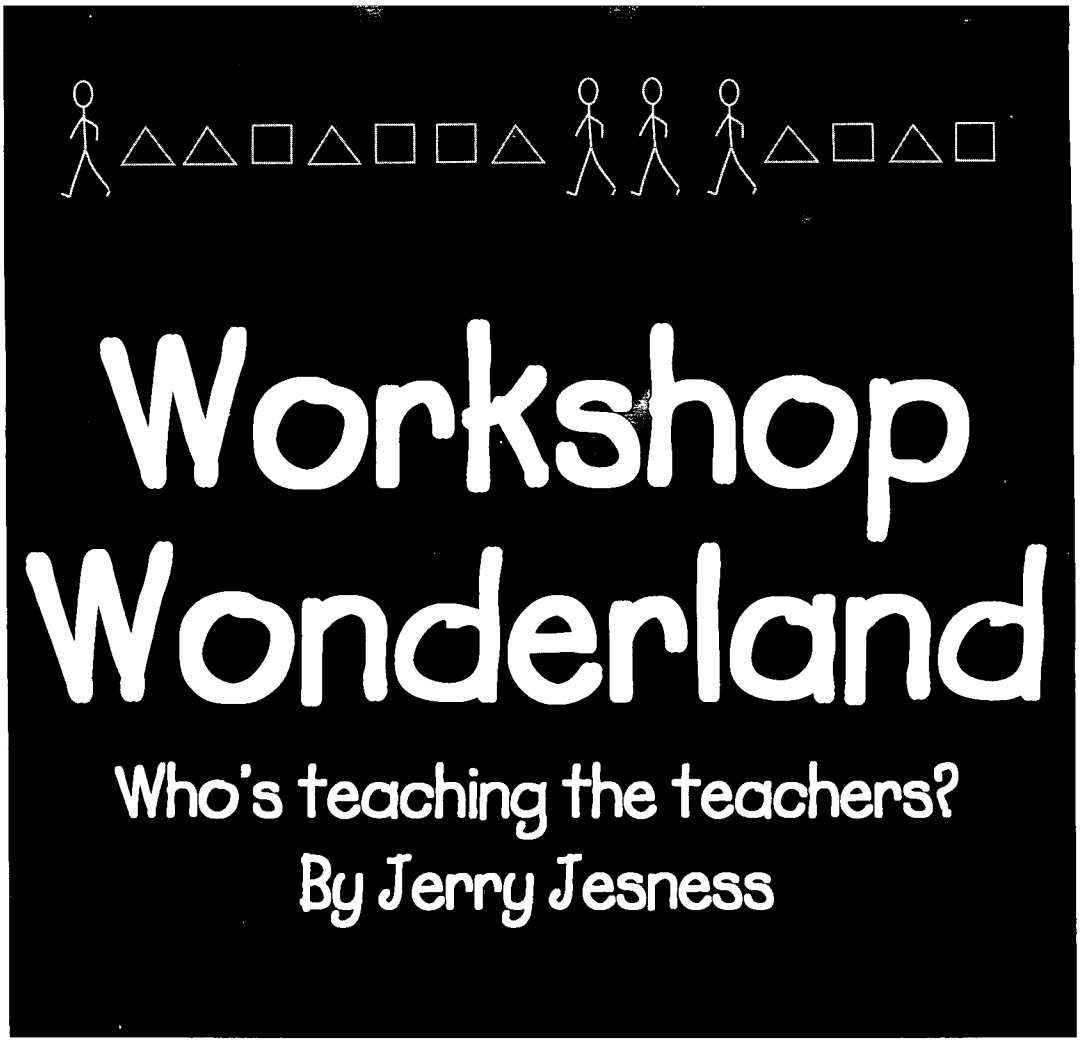
Why arrest 1.6 million people each year for drugs?

Does jailing drug users make more sense than jailing over weight people and smokers?

* Estimated deaths attributed to: Illicit Use of Legal and Illegal Drugs - 20,000; Alcohol - 100,000; Diet/Activity Patterns - 300,000; Tobacco - 400,000.

Source: *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Statistics Source Book 1998 citing 1990 figures.* (Washington, DC: Department of Health and Human Services). Pg. 218

Common Sense for Drug Policy, Kevin B. Zeese, President
703-354-9050, info@csdp.org, http://www.csdp.org/.



Workshop Wonderland

Who's teaching the teachers?

By Jerry Jesness

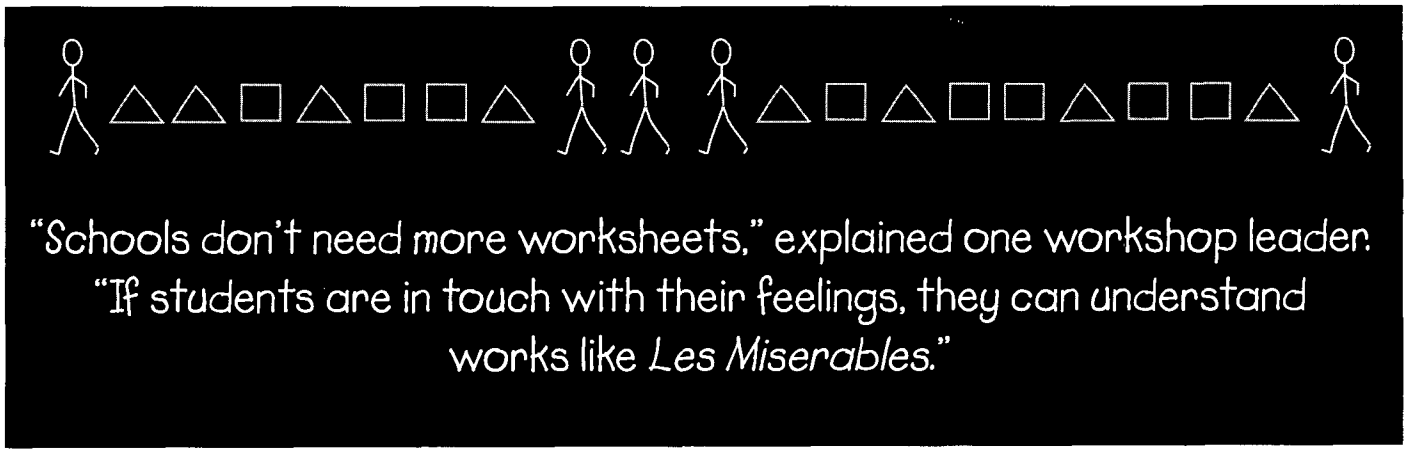
Leaf through the National Education Association's most recent batch of resolutions (available at www.nea.org/resolutions/99/), and you'll find declaration D-14, which states that "continuous professional development is required for teachers and administrators to achieve and maintain the highest standards." It's hard to argue with the sentiment—except that in schools the usual means of encouraging professional development is the teacher workshop. And anyone who thinks education can be substantially improved with workshops probably hasn't ever attended one.

Not all such sessions—"teachers' in-service training" is the preferred jargon—are a waste of time. It makes sense to pursue advanced study in the field you teach, and we teachers ought to stay abreast of such topics as new laws affecting schools. But most other workshops are misguided, or foolish, or actually dangerous, should the ideas they present fall into the hands of teachers or administrators naive or ignorant enough to take them seriously.

Not long ago, for instance, I went to a workshop titled "Multisensory Grammar." There we learned that students will learn grammar more easily if, before launching into such difficult concepts as "nouns" and "verbs," we first teach them to identify the different parts of speech as blue, red, yellow, green, and orange words. Some lucky teachers were called to the front of the class and asked to place translucent chips on an overhead projector while the rest of us wrote sentences that followed their code. As I recall, "The cat ate the mouse" was a red-blue-orange-red-blue sentence.

At another workshop, we broke up into small groups, each of which got to read Edgar Allan Poe's "Annabel Lee" its own way. Our group did it as a rap. Our neighbors did it as a melodrama. Another group sang it as a round, to the tune of "Row, Row, Row Your Boat." None of us conveyed the sense of a widower grieving for his young, dead wife, but we managed to kill more than an hour, and, the consultant assured us, we had fun as we learned.

A very popular workshop topic is standardized tests. There's a consultant from the Dallas, Texas, area who travels around the Lone Star State giving a presentation called "Book and Brain for the TAAS." (TAAS is the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, the Holy Grail of elementary and secondary education in my state. A high pass rate means your school is "successful.") This consultant claims to have studied past TAAS tests and discovered key words and phrases that distinguish a "book" question, which can be answered by matching an answer choice to a part of the text, from a "brain" question, which requires actual thought. Students, she says, should answer the book questions first and dedicate their remaining time to the brainers. I'm not certain whether this technique does anything to raise test scores, but it certainly does nothing to improve students academically.


"Schools don't need more worksheets," explained one workshop leader. "If students are in touch with their feelings, they can understand works like Les Miserables."

elephant

Until very recently, "whole language" techniques dominated the workshop market for reading teachers. Invariably, such sessions would begin with a testimonial more at home in a revival tent than a schoolhouse. Like the teachers in attendance, the consultant would aver, she had been reluctant to stop giving spelling tests. She had been even more reluctant to abandon systematic instruction in phonics. But once she broke the chains of tradition and stepped into the whole-language sunshine, all was well.

Some words, I learned at one such workshop, look like the object that they describe. The word *elephant*, for example, looks like an elephant: It is a big word, and the *e* at the beginning looks kind of like an elephant's trunk. And the word *monkey* resembles a monkey, because the *y* is like a monkey's tail. I couldn't see it, but I can never see the images in Magic Eye 3-D pictures either. I also learned that day that whole language instruction was helping create the most competent and enthusiastic readers ever. Which may be true, if one defines reading as tracing words to see whether they look like something from the zoo.

Mercifully, whole language is falling out of fashion. The equally silly "constructivist math," however, still seems to be going strong. Constructivist math, otherwise known as new-New Math or fuzzy math, grew out of recommendations from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. The group said students should not merely be taught algorithms but should be allowed to discover mathematical principles for themselves. The vilified "drill-and-kill" approach, in which students recited multiplication tables and the like, should be shunned; students must seek creative ways to solve problems. These included counting fingers or blocks, making charts, writing out the problem in other words, and drawing pictures.

Drawing pictures? Yes: Our students were to learn to depict people as stick men. Objects would be represented by simple shapes. We got to practice this ourselves. "Draw three houses," the consultant commanded, and we drew three triangles. "Draw

10 girls," he continued, and we drew 10 stick figures. "Draw nine trees," he added, and we drew nine squares. In the spirit of multiculturalism, he also asked us to draw four *acetunas*, the Spanish word for olives. He then pointed out with glee that even those who did not speak Spanish could comply by drawing four circles.

Many in-service sessions include a component meant to "sensitize" us to our students' frustrations, especially if the children are learning-disabled, poor, or from foreign countries. Sometimes the consultant rattles off a dozen or so instructions in less than a minute, then loudly chastises us for not immediately following them. Or perhaps she will order us to take dictation onto a page that we hold atop our heads, behind our backs, or beneath our chairs. At one workshop, we were told to assemble jigsaw puzzles, some of which lacked key pieces. At another, we were given team names and told to seek out our teammates. Some of us had no teammates, so our quest was futile. Such impossible tasks, the consultant assures us, are the equivalent of what we put our students through every day.

I once went to a workshop for teachers of students with limited English proficiency, in which participants were given worksheets written mostly with nonsense words. We were ordered to read them and then answer several ensuing questions; we were chastised when we failed to do so successfully. We were told that we now felt the pain our students allegedly endured on a daily basis. (I suppose it did emulate their *first* day of class.)

The message: Failure is painful, so we should give our students the benefit of the doubt whenever we can.

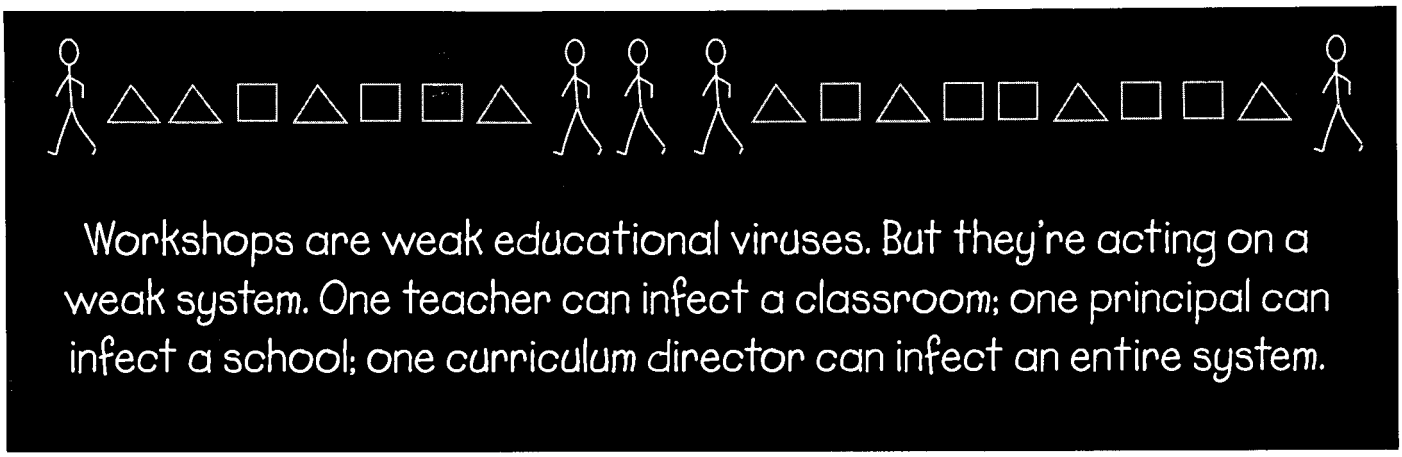
And then there are the sessions on psychology. These are usually run by counselors or education psychologists, many of whom are more familiar with books like *I'm OK, You're OK* than with the works of Freud, James, Jung, or Piaget. Last fall, several of us were subjected to a dressing-down from a fellow with a guitar and a doctorate in educational psychology. After singing us a cute little song about feeling good, he chastised us for placing too much emphasis on thinking and not enough on feeling. "Schools don't need more worksheets," he explained. "If students are in touch with their feelings, they can understand, for example, works like *Les Miserables.*"

Apparently, students don't have to study French history or look up lots of big words to get the most out of that book. If they think about how they felt the last time they were grounded, they will understand how Valjean felt when he went to prison. If they think about babysitting their little sisters, they will understand his feelings toward Cosette.

In the old days, when left-brain/right-brain theories were in vogue, education psychologists seldom passed up a chance to mention them. Apparently, some of Our Top Education Researchers had concluded that learning disabilities were brought on by disjunctures between the brain hemispheres. At one very popular workshop, teachers were taught to have their learning-disabled students twirl ribbons in front of their eyes. As I recall, the twirling was a right-brain activity, while the act of watching the ribbon was a left-brain one. Doing both together was supposed to train the hemispheres to communicate, thus eliminating the students' disabilities, or at least enabling them to read and chew gum at the same time.

My all-time favorite workshop was held at the South Dakota Indian Educators convention in 1980. There I learned that American Indians, like Asians, were right-brained people, while those of European stock were left-brained. Right-brained people, we learned, most easily learn to read ideograms, while left-brainers were better at reading phonetic script. The consultant stopped short of suggesting that we teach our Lakota students Chinese, but he wanted us to understand that we were forcing our students to read an alphabet that was not natural to them, so we should at least feel a bit guilty.

As mathematician Wayne Bishop has written, workshops are the mechanisms that spread educational viruses. Granted, they're weak viruses, but they're acting on a weak system. One gullible teacher can infect a classroom; one principal can infect a school; one curriculum director can infect an entire school system. Surely there are better roads to "continuous professional development" than this one. ◆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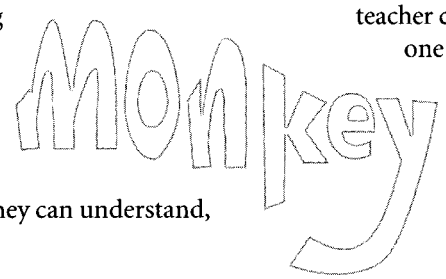
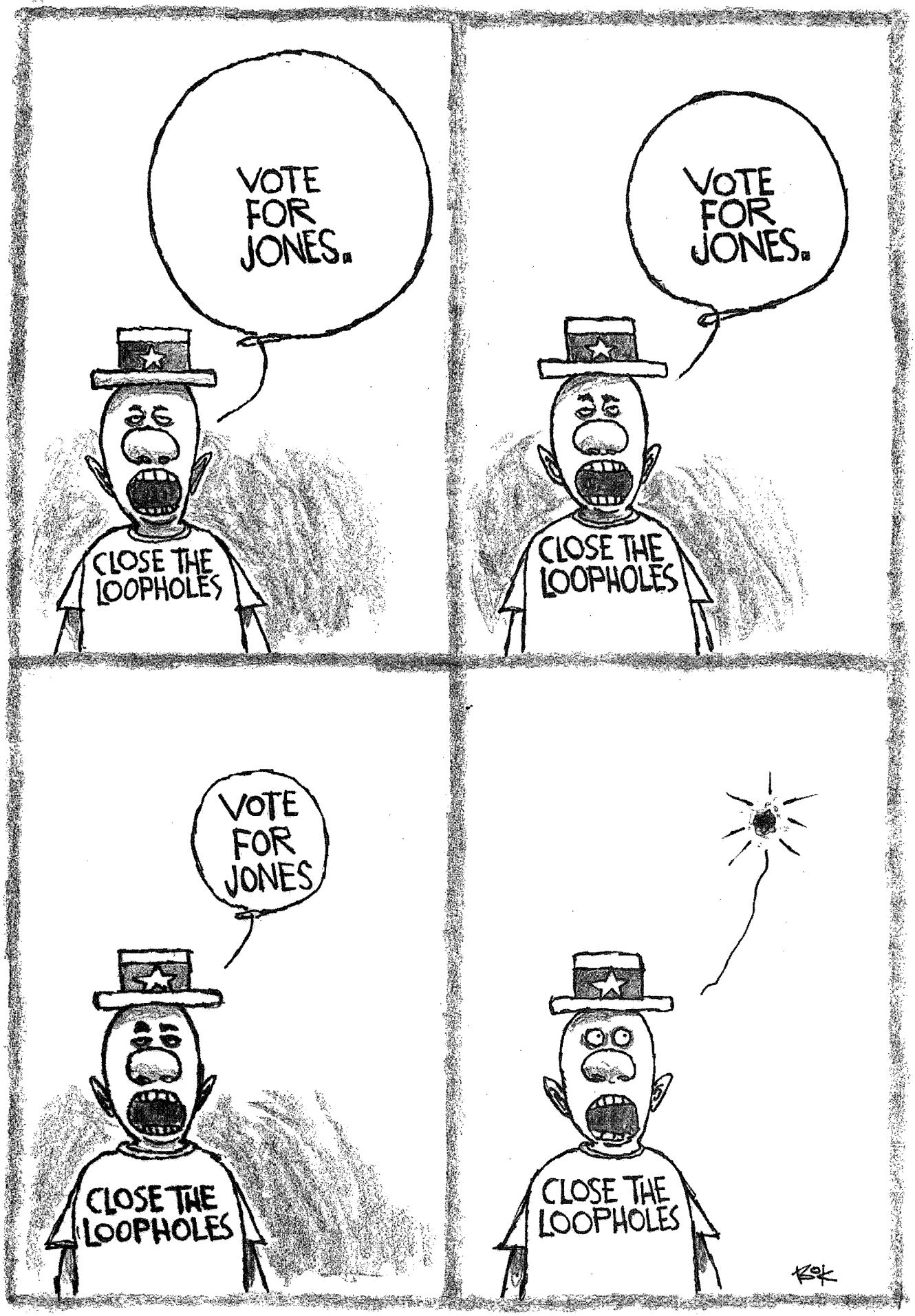


Jerry Jesness (furnes@yahoo.com) is a special education teacher in Texas' Lower Rio Grande Valley.


VOTE FOR JONES.
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KOK

Free Money

Campaign finance "loopholes" are the best part of the system.

Once again we are preparing to choose federal, state, and local officials to preside over governments that redistribute about 38 percent of the GNP, enact and administer thousands of criminal laws, and assert an open-ended right to regulate every aspect of our lives. And once again the subjects of this power think they should be allowed to influence the outcome. People want to donate money to the candidates they favor, tell potential voters about candidates and issues, expand the channels of information beyond the conventional media, form organizations with others of like mind, establish Internet sites, and, in general, *participate.*

This desire to participate upsets most journalists, many politicians, and a large percentage of the nation's intellectual and financial elites. The Web site of Common Cause (www.commoncause.org/publications/campaign_finance.htm), the organization that for 25 years has been the mainspring of the campaign for election finance reform, features alarmist headlines such as "Ka-Ching: National Parties Raise Record $160.5 Million in Soft Money Through First 15 Months of 2000 Election Cycle." The Committee for Economic Development (www.ced.org), a voice of the business establishment, is equally concerned, blaming the "vast sums of unregulated 'soft money'" for all the ills of the current electoral process and advocating fundamental reforms to "restore trust and balance."

During this year's Republican primaries, John McCain used the campaign finance issue to harvest great media acclaim and boost his candidacy. The topic played poorly with the nones-

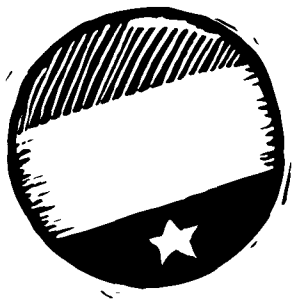
CHIP BOK

By James V. DeLong

In the campaign of 1789, George Washington spent £39 on "treats" for the voters. He may have been the last president not to be subjected to complaints about the evil power of money.

tablishment parts of the Republican Party, both social and economic conservatives. They understood that McCain was telling the party to commit suicide, since his reforms would have disarmed Republican constituencies while leaving the power of labor unions, government employees, and celebrities untouched.

Still, the issue has enough media traction that George W. Bush has made reform noises. He proposes a ban on "soft money" contributions to parties by unions and corporations, along with stronger protections for union members who don't want their dues used for political purposes with which they disagree. These changes would affect Democrats as well as Republicans, so they will never pass. Al Gore, of course, favors reform, as long as he gets to define it. He would eliminate all "soft money" but allow everyone, including unions and corporations, to contribute to a nonpartisan fund that would be used to pay for the campaigns of congressional candidates who agree to spending limits.



As reflected in Gore's plan, critics of the current system tend to focus on the "loopholes" they believe undermine noble but inadequate attempts to control corruption. In particular, they decry "soft money" contributions to political parties, which are not subject to statutory limits, and spending by groups that care deeply about particular issues and want to communicate their concerns to candidates and the public. Yet almost everything the reformers say about "loopholes" is flat-out wrong. The practices branded as loopholes are not only legitimate, they are the best part of the system. Every lover of democracy and freedom should be working to expand them until they swallow the absurd rules that currently govern campaign finance. Given the inevitable failure of the Federal Election Commission's dithering efforts to regulate political speech on the Internet, that day may not be far off.

Evil Influence

In the campaign of 1789, George Washington spent £39 on "treats" for the voters. This was not much, but he was the only candidate and there weren't many voters. Washington may have been the last president not to be subjected to complaints about the evil power of money. By 1800, when Jefferson beat Adams, the financial power of banks played a role. By the post–Civil War era, both parties were shaking down public employees for contributions; in Pennsylvania during the 1870s, Republicans demanded 2 percent of their salaries. After civil service reform dried up this revenue source, the parties turned to the newest pot of wealth, big corporations.

The election of 1896 is generally cited as the great watershed in campaign finance. Mark Hanna, an Ohio industrialist, raised $7 million ($100 million in today's dollars) to help William McKinley beat William Jennings Bryan. The money came from corporations dedicated to the gold standard and protective tariffs, and Hanna asked them to contribute their "fair share," reflecting their stake in the general prosperity. His approach struck another modern note, says historian Thomas Fleming: "Hanna refused to promise any specific favor or service; rather, he sold the glittering concept of 'access' and a government that smiled on corporations."

Sympathy for Bryan is not entirely in order, because the populist's backers were wealthy individuals, notably financier Augustus Belmont of New York. But Hanna's tactics prompted a public outcry, and after McKinley's assassination in 1901 corporate America got Theodore Roosevelt, who was willing to ride the rising public concern about business money. A $50,000 check from New York Life to Roosevelt's 1904 campaign received unpleasant publicity, so, in another modern touch, he learned from his mistakes and proposed a ban on all political contributions and the funding of campaigns by the government.

Congress did not go that far, but it did ban corporate contributions to federal elections in 1907, require disclosure in 1910, impose expenditure limits in 1911, and require yet more disclosure in 1925. During the New Deal, Republican fears of the new army of bureaucrats brought about the Hatch Act of 1939, which limited government employees' political activity. As a balancer, caps were imposed on individual contributions to campaigns and on expenditures on presidential elections. The rising power of unions was attacked in 1943, when they, like corporations, were forbidden to con-

tribute to federal campaigns.

It did not take long to find loopholes in these reforms. For example, the parties quickly decided that the 1939 limits on contributions and expenditures applied only to individual committees and that there was no limit on the number of committees a party could form. The 1940 election was characterized by multiple committees, no real limits on either contributions or expenditures for anyone who knew enough to write more than one check, and a new record for money spent on a presidential election: $21 million, or $257 million in 2000 dollars.

Costs kept rising—Johnson vs. Goldwater cost $60 million in 1964, Nixon vs. Humphrey $100 million in 1968 ($331 million and $492 million, respectively in current dollars)—and the issue finally erupted in the 1970s. In 1971 Congress passed a mild bill, directed mostly at disclosure. The election of 1972 set new records for spending ($400 million for all parties in all races, or $1.6 billion in current dollars) and was followed by the post-Watergate disclosures of sleazy tactics. With the public aroused, the result was the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1974.

It was promptly challenged by one of the oddest coalitions ever to enter a courtroom. The plaintiffs included conservative New York Sen. James Buckley (brother of William F.), liberal Sen. Eugene McCarthy, the American Civil Liberties Union, the Mississippi Republican Party, and the Libertarian Party. In *Buckley v. Valeo*, the U.S. Supreme Court rightly found that large chunks of the law violated the First Amendment right of free speech. Other provisions were upheld, though, based on distinctions not readily apparent to the naked eye.

Buckley was quickly followed by important decisions of the new Federal Election Commission (which had been established by the 1974 law) and then by more congressional action in response to both the Court and the FEC. When the dust settled, we had pretty much our current system, though there have been some tweaks since, largely in the form of FEC and judicial interpretations of the '74 law.

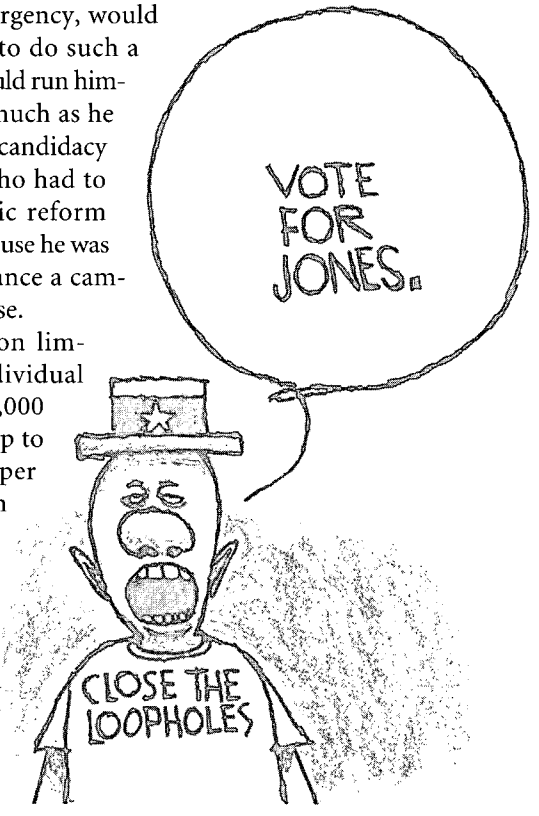
Speech Impediments

The fundamental problem with controlling campaign finance involves free speech. How can government constitutionally prohibit someone, whether an individual or a corporation, from running an ad that says "Candidate X is a schmuck" or "Candidate Y voted for higher defense budgets"? In fact, given First Amendment precedents, how can the government prevent a citizen from donating money for a candidate to spend on such messages? Free speech rights are not easily reconciled with the laws passed in the 1970s, and the courts have spent a quarter-century in the delicate political task of accommodating reformist alarms without doing excessive violence to the Constitution.

The task is complicated by the reality that campaign laws present a stark fox-guarding-the-henhouse scenario: Except for judicial enforcement of the Constitution, incumbents have carte blanche to write the rules under which people will try to unseat them. Any legislators who cannot protect themselves forever are too dumb to deserve to stay in office. In 1998, political action committees gave $220 million to congressional races; 78 percent went to incumbents, 10 percent to challengers, and 12 percent to candidates in open-seat races.

The courts are not big on contemporary political theory, and they rarely make use of public choice models that assume politicians, like actors in the private sector, relentlessly seek to increase their market share. The models of administrative law the courts do use are all based on treacly New Deal platitudes. Nonetheless, many judges, especially in the U.S. circuit courts, are aware of the campaign laws' potential as incumbent-protection devices, and this awareness infuses their decisions, however subtly. In *Shrink Missouri Government v. Adams* (1998), for example, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 8th Circuit expressed skepticism about the testimony of various state legislators concerning the need to battle "corruption," noting that they had failed to cite any actual instances.

In *Buckley*, the Supreme Court struck down provisions of the 1974 law imposing limits on expenditures in House and Senate races. It also threw out, as an unconstitutional abridgement of free speech, limits on how much a wealthy person can spend on his own campaign. But limits on how much a person can give to someone else's campaign were upheld, and so were limits on how much an individual can give to all campaigns in a single year. Money, in the Court's view, somehow loses its character as speech when it leaves the donor's hands. Stewart Mott, the heir to a fortune in General Motors stock who largely funded Eugene McCarthy's 1968 insurgency, would no longer be able to do such a thing, though he could run himself and spend as much as he wanted. Hence the candidacy of Steve Forbes, who had to carry the economic reform banner himself because he was not allowed to finance a campaign by anyone else.



The contribution limits—$1,000 to individual campaigns and $5,000 to PACs per year, up to a total of $25,000 per year—have not been raised since 1974, even though inflation has reduced their real value by two-thirds. The next time some incumbent moans about how much

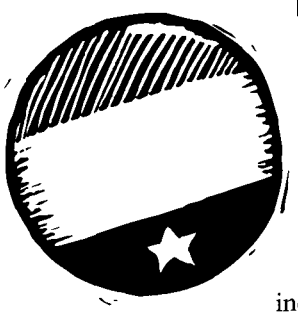
time he spends raising money, think of how simple it would be to increase the limits, and suppress your sympathy. The limits may make an incumbent's life unpleasant, but they make a challenger's impossible, and that is why they remain.

Pre-1974 bans on campaign contributions by corporations and unions remained in place, except that the 1974 law allows these organizations to pay the costs of administering political action committees. PACs can collect contributions from individuals and dole them out to candidates, subject to the limit on the amount contributed to any single campaign.

The law also established the FEC to administer the system, write regulations, and implement myriad reporting requirements imposed on everyone who dabbles in elections. This has led to a numbing array of nit-picking rules. The FEC's *Campaign Guide for Corporations and Labor Unions* is 80 pages long, and the print is small. There are separate guides for party committees, for candidates, and for PACs. The FEC digest of court cases on the law decided between 1976 and September 1999 contains 328 entries. The list of FEC advisory opinions issued since 1977 totals more than 1,130. These concern issues such as whether companies may reimburse their employees for making campaign contributions (forbidden) and whether fathers may funnel dollars through their kids (also forbidden, but you can use your spouse, as long as both names are on the account and both sign the check).

Forbidden Words

The biggest regulatory challenges come from those areas that reformers call "loopholes" and others call the exercise of free speech rights. These fall into three categories: independent expenditures, soft money, and volunteer activity.



An independent expenditure is spending by someone outside a campaign that is not coordinated with the campaign. Advertising is the most obvious example, but the category also encompasses material such as voter guides. If these were classified as campaign contributions, it would be illegal for businesses, unions, and nonprofit corporations to make them at all. For individuals, their cost would count against contribution limits.

In 1974, Congress, acting just as a public choice theorist would predict, did indeed try to control independent expenditures. But the pesky Supreme Court would not agree. In *Buckley*, it read the statute narrowly so as to avoid constitutional problems (a tried and true legal technique), saying the prohibition of corporate expenditures "in connection with an election" extended only to contributions to candidates and "express advocacy," which meant ads using phrases like "Vote for Candidate X" or "Defeat Candidate Y."

"Issue ads" that present an argument and perhaps link it to a candidate but that stop short of express advocacy are not covered by the law. Similarly, other expenditures of all sorts are allowed as long as they are not coordinated with a particular campaign. A later case held that even express advocacy is protected if it is conducted by a nonprofit corporation and is not coordinated with a candidate's campaign. (*A fortiori*, this applies to individuals.) The FEC has moved to bring such spending into the system, though, counting donations to advocacy groups against limits on individual contributions to candidates and requiring extensive reporting.

After *Buckley*, groups with a stake in elections learned the arts of independent action and issue advocacy. Unions poured $40 million into the 1996 election, environmentalists use issue advocacy regularly, and various conservative groups depend on it. To reformers, this participation by groups that care about issues is a "loophole."

A brisk legal business advises people how to walk the line between issue advocacy, which escapes regulation, and express advocacy. To the FEC, an ad saying, "Higher defense spending is good; Congressman X is opposed to it," is express advocacy. But if it says, "Higher defense spending is good; write Congressman X and tell him to change his position," it is an issue ad. The FEC keeps pushing to expand the law's coverage, and the courts, for the most part, keep pushing back. (See "Feckless FEC," July 1997.)

In one of the weirder aspects of this odd field, the definition of express advocacy differs in the East and the West. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit, which covers California and eight other states, supports a squishy FEC test that says it all depends on what you intended to do. Other circuits say that only the precise words mentioned in *Buckley* and their synonyms are covered.

Lifeblood of the Party

The second big alleged loophole is called "soft money." State and national political parties are allowed to collect funds for general "party building" activities without having these count against the donors' annual contribution limits. Perhaps more important, these contributions can come from unions and corporations, entities that cannot give directly to campaigns at all. The parties must report the money to the FEC, and they must not coordinate their spending with campaigns.

The current deluge of soft money stems from a 1978 FEC advisory opinion that expanded the extent to which the parties could use such funds for purposes such as registration and get-out-the-vote drives. Predictably, these activities are now given an expansive reading, encompassing major electioneering. In 1992, the major parties collected $86 million in soft money, but its utility was still thought to be limited because everyone assumed that if they tried to push much beyond registration and get-out-the-vote drives, they would cross the line into illegal coordination. The FEC took the view that party committees were too close to the candidates to be independent and thus could never

The more money spent, the better. The more voices, the better. The more that citizens feel they can participate and be heard, the better. The less governments try to control advocacy, the better.

meet the requirement that expenditures on advertising or materials not be coordinated with a campaign.

Two things happened in 1996 to change this. The Supreme Court decided that a Republican state committee in Colorado that ran ads against a Democratic senatorial candidate was in fact independent of the Republican candidate. More important, President Clinton boasted of raising millions of dollars for early issue ads and personally vetting the campaign. The Republicans countered with their own spending spree, though they were slow off the mark, and soft money given to the parties reached $260 million that year.

Despite his boasts, the enforcers did nothing about Clinton, which had to mean they did not regard his actions as "coordination" that destroyed the "independence" of the expenditures. But if these actions were not "coordination," then nothing is, which means that the noncoordination requirement is dead. The FEC is now conducting a rulemaking proceeding to define *coordination.*

By 2000, Hillary Rodham Clinton's Senate campaign was telling people to make a big contribution and let the campaign staff break it down into hard money for the campaign, hard money for her related campaign committee, and soft money to be used by other committees for "party building." The president was equally overt, crisscrossing the nation to raise money from corporations and wealthy individuals, and the Republicans responded in kind, pulling out their own gate attractions, such as they are, and tapping into business executives and conservative entrepreneurs.

Celebrity Skin

The third gap in the law, though no reformer would dream of calling *this* a loophole, is voluntary activity by individuals, which is not covered by contribution limits. This exemption is an important reason for the rising political power of celebrities. The most conspicuous recent example of celebrity volunteering was Robin Williams' performance at the Democratic National Committee's record-breaking "barbecue bash" in late May, which raised $26.5 million. On a more modest but still impressive scale, an entertainer can contribute her time for a fundraiser; draw, say, 10,000 people at $100 a pop; and net a cool $1 million for the campaign. The presumptively corrupting industrialist can contribute a mere $5,000. Politicians spend a lot of time in Hollywood these days.

Another important effect of allowing unlimited voluntary activity is to give power to unions and to big government, categories that are increasingly overlapping. About 1.7 million civilians work for the federal government, and almost 13 million more earn a living producing goods and services for the feds, not counting state and local workers paid with federal dollars. State and local governments employ 17 million people. Add it up, and 22 percent of the civilian labor force of 138 million people works for governments. Public sector employees are much more likely to be unionized than are private sector employees: Unions cover 60 percent of the direct federal work force and 38 percent of state and local employees, compared to less than 10 percent of the private sector work force. All told, about 40 percent of the nation's 16.2 million union members are public employees.

Wall Street Journal columnist Paul Gigot notes that "government has become the ultimate special-interest lobby, always arguing for more government and always in apocalyptic terms." The numbers bear him out. In the 1997–98 election cycle, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) was number three on the list of PAC contributions, with $2.4 million, all to the Democrats. (Numbers one and two were the realtors and the trial lawyers.) Media references to the role of "unions" in campaigns are largely references to public employees, and under the current laws their power is considerable. Unions can establish PACs to give hard money, and they can use dues for soft money and issue advocacy. In theory, a worker has a right to object and get back the portion of his dues used for politics, but this right has been gutted by administrative and judicial actions.

Unions are also the infantry of elections. They get out the vote, go door-to-door, and stuff envelopes. In this year's New Hampshire primary, more than 2,000 federal employees worked for Al Gore. In New York, union members distributed 1 million Gore fliers at 10,000 workplaces just before the March primary.

Current discussions of "reform" focus primarily on soft money, but many reformers also want to control issue advocacy, since they regard it as unseemly for those with an

Contribution limits should be removed, even for corporations and unions, and the only requirement should be full and immediate disclosure over the Internet. The only real reform needed is to expand the loopholes.

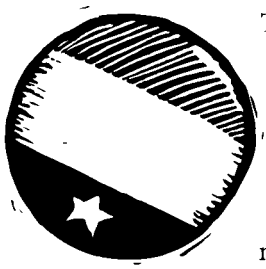
interest in the outcome of elections to interfere. No one talks of tightening the rules governing voluntary activity.

Access Fees

A fair amount of support for control of soft money comes from businesses. Business gets a load of grief from the media for financing politicians, but from the perspective of the givers the system looks like extortion rather than bribery. They fear that failing to pony up means that telephone calls will be unanswered, submissions unread, and representatives left standing out in the hallway while deals are cut in the conference room. So, they think, why not go with the flow, join the public indignation, and encourage Congress to outlaw soft money?

Incumbents could easily be persuaded because soft money tends to go to the parties themselves, where the leadership can use it as a tool of party discipline. The parties could also use soft money to fund challenges to incumbents of the other party, or even to fund primary challenges to some of their own members. Democratic and Republican incumbents alike can agree on the urgent need to avoid such an outrage. Since a nonincumbent finds it impossible to raise significant hard money, soft money is the only real threat to permanent tenure.

Business people think they would still get to talk to their representatives without soft money, only they would no longer be required to pay for the privilege. They also would avoid endless time spent at fundraisers eating insipid food and listening to even more insipid speeches. But it's a mystery why executives think they would prosper if campaigns were dominated by union (i.e., public employee) volunteers and the Washington media, and if no incumbent ever needed to worry about losing an election, not even the little bit they must worry now. (In 1998, 395 of 401 House members seeking re-election succeeded, a rate of nearly 99 percent.) If soft money contributions were banned, the realities would come home to them after a cycle or two, and the logic of the situation would dictate that the former soft money contributors would start funding more issue advocacy, conducted outside the political party structure.



The federal government is now involved in every area of national life, and people with high stakes in government actions need to communicate about those actions. Those stakes need not be economic: Studies indicate that most campaign contributions are motivated by ideology, not financial interest, and those who think the government should go in a certain direction will wish to make their views known. Why would anyone think that candidates should have a monopoly on communications about themselves and their opponents, to the exclusion of interested outsiders? Only an incumbent could love this idea.

One can be sure that a ban on soft money would soon be followed by an escalation in reformist fire at the terrible "loophole" of issue advocacy, whereby those who care about political issues spend money on them. What many "reformers" really fear is not the power of money but the power of ideas, especially ideas skeptical of government. The true agenda is to suppress these; the corrupting influence of money is simply a convenient rationale.

Web of Regulations

Exhibit A for this conclusion is the reformers' attitude toward the Internet, which is becoming the newest "loophole." Instead of rejoicing that the new medium reduces the costs of communication and thus creates great opportunities to cut the tie between money and political speech, the FEC has tried to use the fact that it costs *some* money as a jurisdictional hook to limit it.

Four years ago, CompuServe wanted to create an "Election Connection '96" that would have offered free Web sites to all candidates. No, the FEC said; that would be an illegal corporate contribution.

In 1998 a Connecticut man named Leo Smith put up a Web site advocating the election of one candidate and the defeat of another in a congressional race. He argued this was not an expenditure because his marginal cost was zero. No, said the FEC; because the Web site was of value to the candidate, it counted as an expenditure and was subject to regulation.

A year later, the FEC was presented with a Web site called DNET (Democracy Net) designed by the League of Women Voters and another nonprofit entity to provide comprehensive information on elections. It decided this was *not* an expenditure and was therefore OK. But the commission did not simply repudiate its CompuServe opinion. Instead, it noted that it had considered a number of factors, and that "although all of these factors are relevant, different facts with respect to a particular factor may or may not lead to a conclusion that a website's activities are permissible." In other words, the FEC reserves the right to do whatever it pleases, without explanation.

The story does not end there, because the nonprofits then sold DNET for $30 million to a commercial operation, which is running it as grassroots.com, where it does many things that CompuServe and Leo Smith were forbidden to do. This has triggered a formal complaint to the FEC from the conservative National Legal and Policy Center, which wants to make sure the FEC does not give breaks to the politically correct that are not available to all.

In the meantime, the FEC, faced with a deluge of requests for clarification of its Internet policies, has punted. In December 1999 it issued a request for comment on all aspects of Internet use in campaigns. It received more than 1,200 responses (all of which can be read at www.fec.gov/internet.html) and is now digesting them. The word on the street is that the commission has no intention of doing anything before November, so everyone is left to speculate about what rules apply and what risks they face if they run afoul of what the FEC decides in the future. With any luck, the pressures of the Internet will trigger the demise of the whole system by making the FEC's efforts to micromanage political speech patently impossible.

Real Reform

"That's not a bug," the computer joke goes, "it's a feature." So it is with campaign finance regulation. The loopholes are the only good part of the system. Instead of fretting about how to close them, we should be figuring out how we ever went down such a ridiculous path in the first place, and about how to inoculate the body politic against future folly.

The core idea that too much is spent on elections is downright silly. In 1995–96, federal elections cost about $11 per potential voter. The federal government that year spent about $1.7 trillion, which is about $8,600 per voter; indirectly allocated huge additional chunks of resources; and affected people's well-being in all sorts of other, noneconomic ways. And we are supposed to be appalled that educating the citizenry about the people we put in charge of these activities costs $11 per voter? Clearly, the problem is the reverse: There is gross underinvestment in political information, a problem exacerbated by the reform laws.

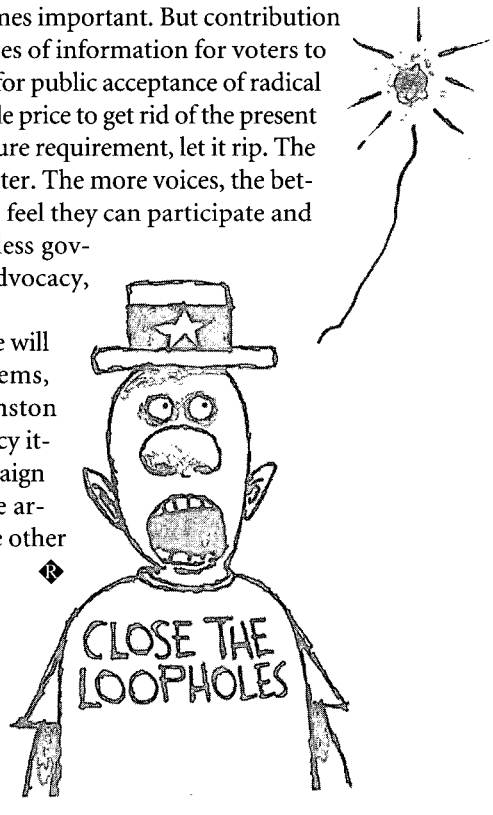
Equally wrong-headed is the idea that most campaign contributions are motivated by a desire for favors. There is a real, though limited, problem with federal corporate welfare payments and associated unsavoriness, but on big issues contributions do not matter much. Business cannot buy votes on Social Security, or defense, or the minimum wage. Bradley A. Smith, a law professor at Capital University in Ohio and a shrewd scholar of the process, wrote in 1996: "Those who have studied voting patterns...are almost unanimous in finding that campaign contributions affect very few votes in the legislature. The primary factors in determining a legislator's votes are party affiliation, ideology, and constituent views and needs. That has been reflected in study after study over the past 20 years....Donors contribute to candidates believed to favor their positions, not the other way round." (Smith, whose skepticism about current regulations scares the so-called reformers, was confirmed as a member of the FEC in May.)

The final rationale trotted out by the reformers is the "appearance of corruption." Even if the system is not really corrupt, people *think* it's corrupt, so the government (i.e. incumbents) should regulate it to avoid this appearance. Unfortunately, the Supreme Court has been sympathetic to this nonsense, which is odd because in every other area of First Amendment jurisprudence such arguments get the summary rejection they deserve.

A real program of campaign finance reform would start from the premise that the First Amendment is not, as the reformers seem to believe, a loophole. The First Amendment, as applied to electoral campaigns, is an indispensable element of representative government. The only real reform needed is to expand the loopholes, not end them. Contribution limits should be removed, even for corporations and unions, and the only requirement should be full and immediate disclosure over the Internet.

There can be First Amendment objections to disclosure, since anonymity is sometimes important. But contribution sources are important pieces of information for voters to get, disclosure is necessary for public acceptance of radical change, and it is a reasonable price to get rid of the present system. Beyond the disclosure requirement, let it rip. The more money spent, the better. The more voices, the better. The more that citizens feel they can participate and be heard, the better. The less governments try to control advocacy, the better.

It won't be pretty. There will be lots of abuses, problems, and outrages. But, as Winston Churchill said of democracy itself, this approach to campaign finance has one irrefutable argument in its favor: All the other systems are worse. ◆



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Virginia Postrel

Impure Thoughts

Waiting for perfectly "clean" opportunities to apply your principles means you could lose them altogether.

Poor Joe Stiglitz. Here he is, an eminent economist, on everyone's short list for a Nobel Prize. He writes a perfectly respectable *New Republic* cover story about the failings of the International Monetary Fund. He's particularly concerned that IMF policies make poor countries experiencing recessions poorer and more depressed. The article makes a big splash. Yet when all the publicity is over, Stiglitz has become the intellectual poster child for anti-trade, anti-growth fanatics. What happened?

Stiglitz got involved in a dirty issue, one entangled in many agendas, and he didn't separate his goals from those of larger, louder, sexier coalitions. He wanted to criticize the IMF and, for maximum effect, he did so as the IMF and World Bank were holding big meetings in Washington. But at the same time, protesters hit the streets to condemn not just specific practices of international lending organizations but globalization, trade, and economic growth. Coming off the much larger anti-trade protests in Seattle, these activists dominated journalists' imagination and, hence, set the terms of the discussion.

So, for instance, when PBS' *Charlie Rose Show* discussed the topic, Stiglitz was paired with Juliette Beck, a young anti-globalization activist and the recent subject of a glowing profile in *The New Yorker*.

When Charlie Rose asked whether she sees any evidence that the World Bank and IMF get the protesters' message, Beck responded, "Quite frankly no. I think that they are still entrenched in their ideology of 'growth is the solution.' Economic growth, frankly, is leading to a decline in almost every ecosystem on Earth. We cannot sustain this level of growth and yet they're promoting more and more economic growth as a solution. We need to rethink the whole economic system that we're living in."

"Rethinking the whole economic system" is a long way from Stiglitz's argument. From Beck's point of view, what Stiglitz dislikes about the IMF would be a wonderful attribute. What's a depression if not the opposite of Earth-destroying "growth"? Further wrecking the economies of Thailand and Indonesia just moves us closer to a "new paradigm" that will save the environment.

Faced with a supposed ally whose explicit agenda is to end economic growth, Stiglitz had a professional, and moral, responsibility to disagree. He needed to explain why trade and growth are essential if the world's peasants are ever to climb out of poverty and how, in his view, the IMF is hampering that process. That was, after all, the thrust of his original criticism.

Egalitarianism, while by no means dead, is not the biggest threat to individual freedom, personal or economic. Bossiness is.

But he had apparently defined his goal as enlisting as many anti-IMF allies as possible, regardless of their agendas. So instead of disagreeing, he kissed up. He said nothing in defense of economic growth, let alone trade. He tried to keep Beck and her followers from supporting Ralph Nader for president; he gushed about how much his man Al Gore defends the environment and worries about population growth. It was disgusting.

It was also understandable. Dirty issues are tricky; they don't break down along neat and clean political or cultural lines. Dealing with them effectively requires more than an ideology or a set of policy goals. It requires a strong sense of the particular political and intellectual moment—of which issues are strategically important and which are less so, of how results are likely to be framed in law and public opinion, of which victories or defeats really matter.

To address dirty issues, you can't just have principles. You have to have priorities. Let's say that you think tax-and-spend redistribution is bad and that the government shouldn't tell people how to live their lives or spend their money. In a perfect world, you wouldn't want any taxes at all, or would want them only to support government activities that benefit everyone, such as the courts or national defense. Either way, you think taxes should be low, low, low. You also want tax policy to be neutral. How, then, should you react to a proposal to give some taxpayers a special break if, say, they buy a new home for the first time or pay college tuition?

It all depends on the political *Zeitgeist*. In the 1970s, the ideology of egalitarian redistribution—"Soak the rich!"—dominated tax discussions. Taxes weren't seen as a necessary evil to fund government spending. They were a righteous cause, a way to right the injustices of a system that made some people richer than others. And the government deserved as much money as it wanted, because it was using it to help people. Marginal income tax rates were extremely high. Under these circumstances, it made sense to adopt Milton Friedman's adage that any tax cut is a good tax cut. At least a few people got to keep a little more of their money.

Today, however, egalitarianism, while by no means dead, is not the biggest threat to individual freedom, personal or economic. Bossiness is. The most potent challenge to markets, and to liberal ideals more generally, is no longer about fairness. It is about stability and control. It is the argument that free social and economic processes are disruptive and chaotic, that they make the future unpredictable, and that

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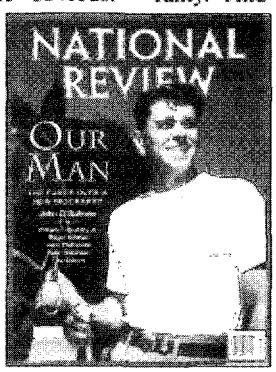

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they serve too many diverse values rather than "one best way." The most important challenge to individual freedom today is not the ideology of egalitarianism but the ideology of stasis: the notion that the good society is one of stability, predictability, and control. The role of the state, in this view, is not so much to reallocate wealth as it is to curb, direct, or end unpredictable economic and social evolution. (See "After Socialism," November 1999.)

In this context, targeted tax credits look bad indeed. They are, as they have always been, a way of favoring some citizens over others, a ready tool for interest-group pandering. Now, however, targeted tax credits also fit into a larger ideological pattern. They bolster the idea that government authority should determine the shape of people's choices. As Bill Clinton famously remarked, a general cut in tax rates, rather than targeted credits, might encourage people to spend their money the wrong way.

Under these circumstances, it may be better to keep the tax code as it is rather than add more loopholes. If tax cutting has been your political lodestar for decades, that's an unpleasant thought. But it's the sort of analysis that dirty issues require.

It's tempting, then, to avoid dirty issues altogether, to "pick clean fights with the other side that aren't muddied by problematic circumstances," as an analyst at a libertarian think tank recently e-mailed me. But rarely do we have the luxury of public policy debates conducted entirely on our own terms. "Problematic circumstances" are everywhere.

Waiting for clean issues is a fine strategy if what you want to do is demonstrate the philosophical consistency of your beliefs, with little concern for what actually happens in the world. Many libertarians are attracted to that sort of utopian purity. But dodging dirty issues is a prescription for symbolic politics that let you feel superior while the world is shaped by the ideas and policies of others. And many of those ideas and policies will be dangerous.

Take the issue we were discussing when my correspondent weighed in on the value of picking only clean fights. In January, the Sierra Club filed suit in Hawaii to block a three-year promotional campaign funded by the state tourism board. The suit argues that Hawaiian law requires an environmental impact study before the state can spend money to attract more tourists. Although the state law has previously been applied only to land use and building projects, its scope isn't specifically limited. The Sierra Club thus argues that since more visitors could damage Hawaii's environment, the promotional campaign shouldn't be allowed to proceed without considering the effects of more tourists.

No big deal, right? It's just a dispute over some pork-barrel spending, "corporate welfare" at the local level. "If the Sierra Club wins their suit," said the analyst, "the only precedent set is that programs we as libertarians otherwise don't like—tourism promotion funded by states—are going to get the same level of environmental scrutiny that other government undertakings get. I certainly am not going to lose sleep over that."

Dodging dirty issues is a prescription for symbolic politics that let you feel superior while the world is shaped by the ideas and policies of others.

Unfortunately, the Sierra Club's agenda has absolutely nothing to do with corporate welfare. Suggesting that the issue is subsidies is like pretending that Juliette Beck is fighting for better IMF fiscal policies. The Sierra Club is trying to get travel declared a form of pollution. "Nearly 7 million tourists descend on Hawaii's beaches and roads and natural areas each year," says Jeffrey Mikulina, director of the group's Hawaii chapter. "Whether an extra million would be the straw that breaks the camel's back needs to be examined."

The Sierra Club chapter in Hawaii isn't just against state spending to promote tourism. It's against more visitors in general. Like Beck, Mikulina is concerned about "the notion of boundless growth." His chapter opposes not just the marketing program but, for instance, any revision in the state's 39-year-old land-use law that might make it easier to build hotels and resorts instead of farms. When land-use reform came up last year, Mikulina had a simple message: "The environmentalists' reaction is, 'Don't touch it.'"

The Sierra Club's suit is certainly incremental, reinterpreting a particular law to curb a particular government activity. A victory would not declare travel illegal. But the Sierra Club is a savvy organization that understands how to build a policy base gradually, step by step. It is working to move law and public opinion toward the assumption that autarky is the natural, proper state of society, and that mobility is suspect, something that must be justified and defended. The Sierra Club may also be smart enough to realize that by attacking subsidies it can get some potential opponents to sit out the debate, just as anti-immigration activists in California made it hard to attack Proposition 187 by framing it as an anti-welfare measure.

But the principle at stake in Hawaii is not business subsidies. It is freedom of movement—a cause worth losing sleep over. And, once again, it is also economic growth. The two issues are inextricably linked with each other and with individual freedom in general.

Business subsidies are wasteful and unfair. But they do not, in our era, represent a systemic threat to liberty. No pro-subsidy ideology is on the march. But those like Mikulina and Beck, who see human mobility, human ingenuity, human pleasure, human life itself as a form of pollution—those who seek to hold the world in stasis lest human action change it—do pose a fundamental challenge to individual freedom and social progress.

Letting these ideas go unchallenged because we might sully ourselves with dirty issues is irresponsible. By waiting for perfectly clean opportunities to apply our principles, we risk losing them altogether. ◆

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Walter Olson

Confessions of a Macaulay Fan

The great liberal historian appreciated on his bicentenary

Is the New Economy leaving behind a trail of exploited workers and uprooted communities? Has an overemphasis on tolerance gone so far as to disadvantage believers in true religion? Is free trade mostly a boon for the few, national sovereignty be damned? Why isn't the government doing more to improve the character and morality of a pleasure-obsessed populace?

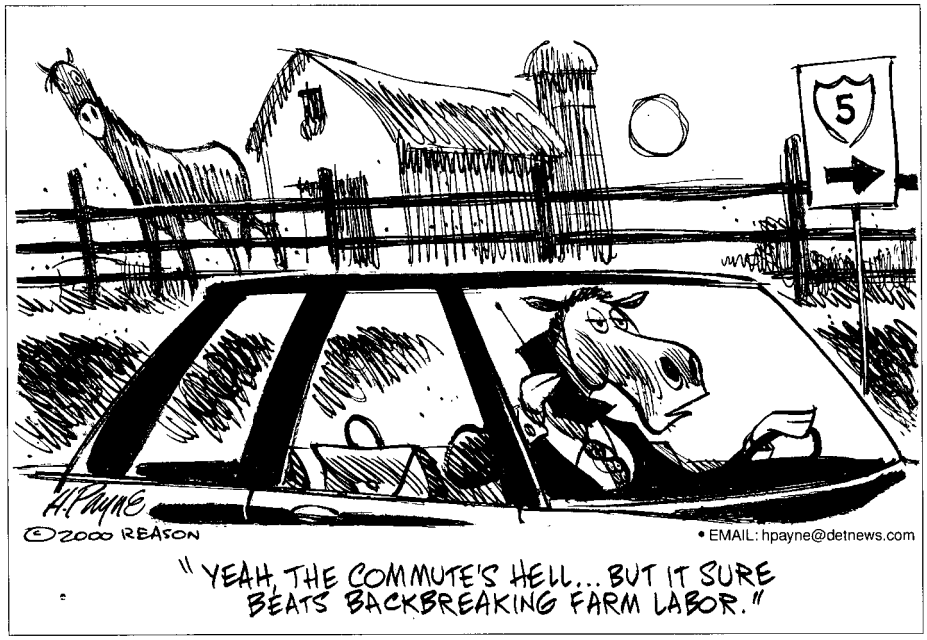
Such questions were the talk of London in 1840, which is one reason I'm always urging people to read the historian-essayist-statesman Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800–1859), a figure overdue for rediscovery given the issues that agitate our current politics. Macaulay has a fair claim to being the most influential of the British classical liberals, and few would dispute that he's the most fun to read. Indeed, the extraordinary clarity, vividness, allusiveness, and energy of his writing style, conceded even by his enemies, won him from early on a huge following everywhere English was spoken. His work ran through endless reprints in 19th and early 20th century America—which makes him a great bargain on eBay—and he served as an influence on and model to Mencken, Churchill, and countless other writers.

These days Macaulay seems to survive mostly as a few familiar nuggets from Bartlett's: the one about how the Puritan hated bear-baiting not because it gave pain to the bear but because it gave pleasure to the spectators; the one about how there's no spectacle more ridiculous than the British public in one of its periodic fits of morality; the not especially prescient one about how the American Constitution is all sail and no anchor; the one about how an acre in Middlesex is preferable to a principality in Utopia. All very well in their way, but one-liners make a poor introduction to a writer known for painting on such gigantic canvases: His *History of England* is among the longest standard works in English, and even the essays can take 10 or 20 pages to warm up before getting to their main theme.

Besides, none of those quotes catch the Whig historian in his most characteristic mood: filled with scorn and wrath at how those in government abuse their power. What propels the reader of his history through the long battle between court and country, between the party of state prerogative and the party of liberty, is the way Macaulay gets you to root for the latter much as one roots for a sports team. But the partisanship is not unrelenting: Constant strokes of characterization, often sharply at cross-purposes with the purely political sympathies, drive home how often folly, knavery, and vice of every sort can be found on the side that turns out to be right in politics, and how often uprightness and intelligence are found on the side that is wrong.

History, Macaulay once wrote, is "made up of the bad actions of extraordinary men," and those who idealize English institutions are likely to squirm at his portraits. The monarchy's occupants, naturally, come off badly, the feckless Stuarts above all. And the law? Even aside from the atrocious proceedings of the Star Chamber and High Commission, the state trials offer little more than a procession of "browbeating judges, packed juries, lying witnesses, clamorous spectators." Sir Edward Coke? A "pedant, bigot and brute," though eventually useful to the cause of liberty. Oxford? Forever squandering its venerable scholarship on devising the most laughably backward defenses for official prerogative.

The churches? "The doctrine which from the very first origin of religious dissensions has been held by bigots of all sects, when condensed into a few words and stripped of rhetorical disguise, is simply this: I am in the right, and you are in the wrong," he observed in one essay. "When you are the stronger, you ought to tolerate me; for it is your duty to tolerate truth. But when I am the stronger I shall persecute you; for it is my duty to persecute error." Each of the rival factions—High Church, Low Church, Catholics—persecuted cruelly when it got to power, and religious tolerance emerged at last in a kind of exhausted tumble when no faction could



HENRY PAYNE

summon a majority for its designs.

An unabashed believer in economic freedom, Macaulay also makes clear the extent to which commercial and civil liberty grew up intertwined: The battle over arbitrary taxation (including the king's famed "ship-money") accounted for many gains in the struggle against arbitrary government conduct in general, while the fight to restrict unlimited search and seizure owed much to the popular resistance to tariffs and monopolies.

Somehow, freedom grew hardy amid the constant assaults, which is very much the Macaulayan concept of liberty: something built up over long agonies like a mass of scar tissue, abuse by abuse and resistance by resistance, its extent and solidity explainable by which bad officeholder had tried and failed to get away with which encroachment on the public during which reign. No one was less interested than he in a priori speculation about how governments ought to work, or more keenly interested in how from experience and observation they actually had worked. His caustic dismissal of the abstract reasonings of the utilitarian James Mill is perfectly characteristic: "We have here an elaborate treatise on Government, from which, but for one or two passing allusions, it would not appear that the author was aware that any governments actually existed among men."

Macaulay may have taken his relentless empiricism too far for some modern libertarians' tastes, but it stood him in good stead when he turned to one of the great controversies of his own day, the new factory system that had transformed Britain amid an export-driven globalization of its economy. Romantics on both the Jacobin left and the traditionalist right were inclined to view this new economy as a blight on the landscape and the soul alike, reducing workers to cogs and neighbors to strangers, throwing up a new and spiritually rootless elite of uncaring bourgeois, and replacing quondam public spirit and noble national purpose with a mere cash nexus.

In one of the great panoramic set pieces of the English language—the famous chapter from his *History* on the condition of England in 1685—Macaulay sets out to cure the reader of any notion that the olden times were better: For page upon page he hammers away at the miserableness of the food, the lodgings, the roads, the communications, the sanitation; the badness of governance; the insecurity of person and property; the prevalence of disorder and crime. It was a time, he writes, when "to have a clean shirt once a week was a privilege reserved for the higher class of gentry" and "men died faster in the purest country air than now die in the most pestilential lanes." With eerie accuracy, he predicted that a century or more hence, among the yet better-fed, better-housed, safer, and happier descendants of his readers, it would "be the mode to assert that the increase of wealth and the progress of science have benefited the few at the expense of the many, and to talk of the reign of Queen Victoria as the time when England was truly merry England, when all classes were bound together by brotherly sympathy."

Macaulay predicted that among the yet better-fed, better-housed, and safer descendants of his readers, it would be common "to assert that the increase of wealth and the progress of science have benefited the few at the expense of the many."

Not infrequently, in their heyday, classical liberals found themselves ranged against a practical alliance between the extreme Tories to their one side and the Jacobins on the other. The campaign for free trade, for example, brought forth noisy counter-demonstrations both from reactionary nationalists and from mobs disrupting public meetings in the name of the working class, prompting this riposte from the historian: "Whenever I hear bigots who are opposed to all reform, and anarchists who are bent on universal destruction, join in the same cry, I feel certain that it is an absurd and mischievous cry; and surely never was there a cry so absurd and mischievous as this cry against cheap loaves." To update the case from the streets of Edinburgh to those of Seattle, it is merely necessary to substitute for the phrase "cheap loaves," "cheap clothes."

Perhaps his favorite target were the individual figures—"Red Tories"—who combined left- and right-wing themes in their loathing of capitalism. Poet laureate Robert Southey, hapless victim of one of Macaulay's most enjoyable polemics, managed to follow a trajectory from far left to far right without spending a moment in actual sympathy with the bourgeois society rising around him. Having cultivated the radical side when it was most in the wrong, he proceeded to do likewise with the reactionaries. Wrote Macaulay: "He has passed from one extreme of political opinion to another, as Satan in Milton went round the globe, contriving constantly to 'ride with darkness.'"

By the time he wrote his *Colloquies*, Southey had homed in on perhaps the most durable critique of capitalism, the aesthetic. Anyone could see its ravages, he said, by standing on a hill and comparing the ivy-clad cottage of the traditional farm laborer with the ugly, uniform brick dwellings of the industrial workers. (His successors today buy newspaper ads that treat it as a rebuke to globalization that there are now cloverleaf interchanges in Cairo and fast-food strips in Bangkok.) Macaulay's response was to pull out rows of vital statistics to demonstrate that the burden of supporting the poor was lowest in the counties where the new manufacturing economy had penetrated furthest, while the death rate had also fallen fastest in those counties.

At the same time, Southey argued fervently that the new industrial regime was far too secular in tone; it now slighted the claims of religion to be the basis of civil government. Macaulay retorted that societies where religious faith has been scanty or missing—he names ancient Athens as an example—have not for that reason found it advisable to dispense with civil government. Given that unbelievers, like everyone else, show a keen concern for not having their goods stolen or homes in-

vaded, "we are at a loss to conceive in what sense religion can be said to be the basis of government, in which religion is not also the basis of the practices of eating, drinking, and lighting fires in cold weather."

Like other Tories, Southey also perceived a decline in national character, a morality gap, which only guidance from on high—"statecraft as soulcraft," we now might say—could hope to rectify: "The maxim, that governments ought to train the people in the way in which they should go, sounds well. [But] can it be laid down as a general rule that the movement of political and religious truth is rather downwards from the government to the people than upwards from the people to the government?" Indeed, "the duties of government would be, as Mr. Southey says that they are, paternal, if a government were necessarily as much superior in wisdom to a people as the most foolish father, for a time, is to the most intelligent child, and if a government loved a people as fathers generally love their children. But there is no reason to believe that a government will have either the paternal warmth of affection or the paternal superiority of intellect."

The practical results of the paternalist view, thought Macaulay, would be meddlesome government on virtually every front. "He [Southey] conceives that the business of the magistrate is not merely to see that the persons and property of the people are secure from attack, but that he ought to be a jack-of-all-trades—architect, engineer, school-master, merchant, theologian, a Lady Bountiful in every parish, a Paul Pry in every house, spying, eavesdropping, relieving, admonishing, spending our money for us, and choosing our opinions for us. His principle is, if we understand it rightly, that no man can do anything as well for himself as his rulers, be they who they may, can do it for him, and that a government approaches nearer and nearer to perfection in proportion as it interferes more and more with the habits and notions of individuals."

There's no space to discuss Macaulay's extensive political career, which is less remembered for the highest positions he held (secretary of war, postmaster-general) than for his success at removing the disabilities inflicted on adherents of minority religions, helping rid the West Indies of the slave trade, and endowing India with a rational criminal code and an educational system based on the English language, an eternal boon to that country whose effects can be traced to this day in such realms as software development. To thank him, skip the monuments and just enjoy his written legacy. "He reads twenty books to write a sentence; he travels a hundred miles to make a line of description," Thackeray put it in an obituary appreciation. "He is always in a storm of revolt and indignation against wrong, craft, tyranny. How he cheers heroic resistance; how he backs and applauds freedom struggling for its own; how he hates scoundrels, ever so victorious and successful; how he recognizes genius, though selfish villains possess it!"

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Banana Republics, With Nuts

By Glenn Garvin

Guide to the Perfect Latin American Idiot, by Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, Carlos Alberto Montaner, and Alvaro Vargas Llosa, translated by Michaela Lajda Ames, New York: Madison Books, 218 pages, $24.95

My Costa Rican friend Celeste, ordinarily mild-mannered to a fault, was turning purple. The TV newscast said her country was about to get its first *maquila*, a factory where cloth would be imported duty free from the United States, cut and sewn into garments, and shipped back to the United States. An enterprising reporter discovered that the Costa Rican seamstresses—though well paid by local standards—would be making about $4 an hour less than similar workers in the States.

"That's *racist*!" Celeste shouted, conveniently overlooking the fact that Costa Rica, where all the local Indians were slaughtered before anybody got a chance to interbreed, is an overwhelmingly white country. "The government has to put a stop to this. You can't pay us less to do the same job as an American!"

"Celeste, you don't pay the same rent or the same grocery bills as an American, either," I pointed out. "Besides, if the company has to pay Costa Ricans the same wages it would pay in New York, what's the point of opening a factory here? They can just keep sewing the shirts in the States and save the shipping expense. And Costa Rica will lose 300 jobs."

"Then we lose the jobs; I don't care!" she barked. "We'd rather lose the jobs than get paid less. We're as good as you! It just isn't *fair*!"

Celeste was far too sweet a person—most of the time, anyway—for me ever to call her an idiot. But Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, Carlos Alberto Montaner, and Alvaro Vargas Llosa, whose instinct for the jugular has evolved far beyond mine, would.

Those three titled their book, newly translated into English, *Guide to the Perfect Latin American Idiot*, and Celeste's attitude is exactly that which the book mocks: that wages are a matter of justice rather than economics; that governments, not the market, create and distribute wealth; that trade is rape; and, especially, that Latin America is poor because the United States is rich. And vice versa, of course.

Guide to the Perfect Latin American Idiot created a sensation when it was first published in Spanish in 1996. In a region where the left lords over the intellectual realm, any book defending markets, free trade, and *el gran Satàn* up north would have triggered widespread spells of fainting and speaking in tongues. But the blood lust with which this book mutilated its targets—pretty much everybody from Simon Bolivar to Fidel Castro—was something special. The reactions varied from exuberance (in Panama, President Ernesto Perez Balladares went on television to announce he'd ordered his cabinet members to read the book) to outrage (in Peru, a bookstore owner recognized one of the authors and had to be dragged away by his own staff as he shrieked insults).

No wonder. *Guide to the Perfect Latin American Idiot* does not dissect the region's populist-nationalist thinkers—it goes at them the way slash-and-burn peasant farmers go after an overgrown field. Consider a few examples:

■ Liberation theology, which portrays Jesus as a Marxist revolutionary and sucked a whole generation of Latin American priests and nuns into active support for communist guerrilla movements, is not about liberation at all, the authors write. Rather, it is "a Christian reflection of Moslem fundamentalism....The logical consequence of this thesis would be theocracy, a political dictatorship based on the divine word interpreted exclusively by a platonic elite of the all-knowing, 'chosen' priests."

■ Argentina's Juan Peron was not a humanitarian liberal who eventually succumbed to the temptations of power after achieving great things for the nation's poor but a paternalistic fascist who utterly destroyed one of the world's most modern and prosperous economies in order to create a cult of personality. "If every Argentine has a Peron in the depths of his soul, it must be excised," the authors write, "with a benign cross if possible, and if not, then with a sharp scalpel."

■ The nationalism Latin American politicians flaunt so proudly, say the authors, is a mutant import from Europe that has produced leaders who are "grotesque and solitary figures, and dangerous mental midgets." Academics and journalists who elevate bandits like Pancho Villa into anti-imperialist heroes are engaging in nothing less than gangster worship: "To attribute to Pancho Villa the sublime principles of politics and economy is like saying that Attila the Hun was a manicurist....If Pancho Villa is Mexico's dignity incarnate, the country's apotheosis, the Mexicans should start fleeing toward Tierra del Fuego."

Thus does *Guide to the Perfect Latin American Idiot* trample through nearly every political garden in the region. The authors—three journalists, former leftists all—wrote the book after sharing a cab back to the hotel at the end of a conference in Bogota during which they lampooned the speakers as, well, idiots, prattling the

DARREN GYGI

same stupid and discredited theories that have been disfiguring Latin America's politics and economies ever since it won independence from Spain at the beginning of the 19th century. The cab ride ended with a decision to write an intellectual history of the region's politics.

The authors argue that the seeds the Spaniards planted in Latin America—of mercantilism, church-state dictatorialism, and general opposition to the Enlightenment—bloomed almost immediately after independence, plunging the region into chaos and poverty. By the end of the 19th century, most Latin American political thought was devoted to figuring out why Spain's former South American colonies were so poor and backward compared to England's former North American colonies, even though both regions had been liberated at roughly the same time and South America had a huge head start in development.

The answer the Latin Americans came up with was: because the *gringos* robbed us. Economics is a zero-sum game; wealth is not created but distributed. If we have less, and they have more, obviously it was stolen from us.

The beauty of this argument is that it's outcome-based, so you needn't be bothered with explaining exactly how the battle of the Alamo is responsible for the fact that the average Paraguayan makes less than $3,000 a year. Latin American sociologists and political scientists write huge, soul-numbing tomes that consist of nothing but several hundred pages of comparative economic statistics, followed by, "See?"

The most infamous expression of this approach is so-called dependency theory (though I must admit I prefer the name Apuleyo Mendoza, Montaner, and Vargas Llosa give it: "We're Poor; It's Their Fault"). In dependency theory, Latin American countries have been forced—first by Europe, later by the United States—to build their economies around the export of one or two major crops or minerals. This not only supplies the *gringos* with cheap commodities and industrial inputs but leaves Latin America dependent upon the whim of an international marketplace controlled by the Illuminati—the industrialized nations. And it keeps Latin Americans from planting crops that could be used in local diets. Like vampires, the *gringos* grow fat and happy as the Latin Americans waste away. Hence the title of one of the most famous expositions of dependency theory, the Uruguayan Eduardo Galeano's *Open Veins of Latin America.*

The problem with dependency theory is that, in point of fact, Washington doesn't give a rat's ass about Latin America from an economic standpoint. Trade with Latin America represents about 3 percent of the United States' gross national product. Everything south of Laredo, Texas, could be sucked up by a passing UFO one night and nobody in Washington would notice, although Justice Department lawyers would probably scurry to and fro trying to find a way to make it one more count in the antitrust suit against Microsoft.

To put it more concretely, it may be very important to Costa Rica to sell coffee to the United States, but it is not *at all* important to the United States to buy it. And that's why the U.S. Marines did not land in Costa Rica when that country, seeking to protect its economy from the vagaries of the commodities market, forged into other industries during the past decade. (Manufacturing microchips for Intel is now the country's top moneymaker. Tourism is number two.)

Dependency theorists make much of Washington's military interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean during the past half-century, but the fact is that, except for Bill Clinton's bizarre nation-building experiment in Haiti, they were all aimed at protecting what were perceived—rightly or wrongly—as U.S. security interests, not economic ones. Had Salvador Allende's government in Chile stuck to nationalizing the property of American companies, the Nixon administration never would have sent the CIA mucking about. In fact, Allende's Christian Democratic predecessor, Eduardo Frei, had seized U.S. copper companies without getting into trouble. The United States took note primarily because Allende permitted Cuban intelligence to establish a major theater of operations in his country.

Not surprisingly, dependency theory is the target of some of the most pulverizing blows in *Guide to the Perfect Latin American Idiot.* The theory, the authors note, could just as easily be turned around to indict Latin Americans for making their *gringo* wage slaves stay up around the clock making luxury items that Latins consume but don't produce. If trade is theft, they say, why not launch "passionate accusations against Latin Americans for stealing computers and planes from the *gringos,* televisions and automobiles from the Japanese....Since Latin America imports more than it exports, it's the rest of the world's circulatory system that is at the mercy of the bloody Latin American sting."

And damn those handmaidens of imperialism, the rapacious multinational corporations, and their incomprehensibly devious ways: "It's a mystery why these thieves in search of others' fortunes spend so much money performing studies, building factories, transporting machinery, technology, and managers, promoting products, distributing goods, and employing workers, not to mention paying the customary bribes....Why don't they just avoid all these costly charades and send in their military forces and carry off our cornucopia once and for all?"

Of course, as the authors acknowledge, these days there's an equal clamor for *more* trade between Latin America and the United States. Even Fidel Castro, who once claimed that U.S. economic exploitation was the source of all of Cuba's problems, has reversed fields, whining constantly that the American embargo is what keeps his country poor.

If anything, *Guide to the Perfect Latin American Idiot* may seem faintly anachro-

Crony capitalism has nothing to do with the free market, of course, but try explaining that to some poor Argentine retiree who can no longer afford the medicine at a newly privatized health service.

nistic to some readers. With Latin America governed almost exclusively by democratic governments that publicly pledge allegiance to the market, why bother beating a dead horse? Since the book was published in Spanish almost four years ago, many of the idiots in *Idiot* have recanted and are trying to do penance. Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the sociologist who in 1969 coauthored *Dependency and Development in Latin America*—a seminal dependency text that the authors of *Idiot* recommend to anyone "who wants to join the clan of mental retardation"—is now president of Brazil and architect of an ambitious plan to liberalize one of the most protectionist economies in the world. Ariel Dorfman, co-author of 1972's *How to Read Donald Duck*, which purported to find coded imperialist messages in the incomprehensible ravings of an animated, speech-impaired waterfowl ("God! How can one be so stupid and not die in the process?" wonder the authors of *Idiot*), recently apologized in his autobiography for his role as chief propagandist in the Allende government.

Unfortunately, though, there are signs —plenty of them—that Latin America's love affair with the market may be going sour. However much reforms have improved macroeconomic indicators, the worm's-eye view has often remained the same. Most privatizations simply pass state monopolies into private hands, thrilling the World Bank by getting them off the government books but doing little or nothing to improve service and rates for the individual consumer.

Peru, Mexico, Panama, Guatemala, and Argentina, for example, all sold off their state phone companies, but customers still pay staggering prices to the new private owners, who got an array of legal protections from competition as part of the purchase price. Public transport was privatized in Argentina and Nicaragua, but each route is owned by a single company. The list goes on and on. Meanwhile, the proceeds of privatizations frequently wind up in the pockets of government officials and their pals, who often make little attempt to conceal what's going on. One Argentine official flew 150 guests to Alaska for a wedding, where the party favors were gold nuggets.

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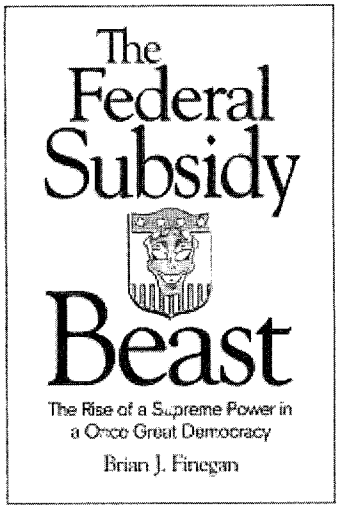

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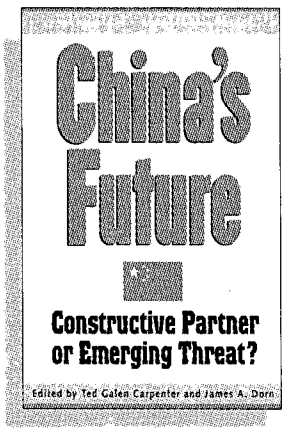

China's Future
Edited by
Ted Galen Carpenter and
James A. Dorn
Available at fine bookstores.
378 pp./$19.95 cloth
$10.95 paperback

Relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China have become erratic and contradictory. Is China a rising colossus that intends to bully its neighbors, or is it a country that has already moved far along the road to a market economy and open society committed to cooperation with the United States? The distinguished contributors to the book examine those questions and their implications for U.S. policy.

Whether China's future is as a constructive partner or an emerging threat ultimately will depend, says Liu Junning in his chapter, "on the fate of liberalism in China: a liberal China will be a constructive partner."

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This crony capitalism has nothing to do with the free market, of course, but try explaining that to some poor Argentine retiree who can no longer afford the medicine at a newly privatized health service, or a Guatemalan street vender whose bus fare downtown has just doubled. Because so many of Latin America's economic reforms have been limited or distorted, they've offered new ammunition to political forces that hate markets. A bus fare increase in Guatemala and an attempt to sell part of the state phone company in Costa Rica both ended in widespread rioting last spring. Even the faintest whisper of privatizing the oil industries in Mexico or Venezuela—although government ownership has squandered hundreds of billions of dollars of revenue over the past two decades without doing anything to reduce the painful levels of poverty in either country—provokes total hysteria.

None of this has done much to enhance the reputation of democracy around Latin America, either. A recent survey by the Chilean research firm MORI showed that only in two Latin countries, Costa Rica and Uruguay, do the populations give democracy an approval rating of more than 50 percent. The old hunger for populist strongmen is reasserting itself, most obviously in Venezuela, where former military coup meister Hugo Chavez won an overwhelming presidential victory and promptly closed Congress and threw out the constitution. Guatemalans stampeded to elect Alfonso Portillo after he began running TV ads boasting that he killed two Mexican law school professors in the 1980s. December's tight presidential race in Chile was between right-wing populist Joaquin Lavin and socialist Ricardo Lagos Escobar, while the only candidate who defended market economies finished a distant third. And in Mexico, *Subcomandante* Marcos, head of the Zapatista rebels in the Chiapas region, continues to receive worshipful pilgrims from the alleged intelligentsia.

All this has provided Apuleyo Mendoza, Montaner, and Vargas Llosa with plenty of material for a new book that's on the Latin American best-seller lists, *Fabricantes de Miseria* (*Manufacturers of Misery*). Unless Latin American governments begin embracing the substance of economic modernization instead of just the form, I fear there will be room for many more volumes in the series. For that matter, there's plenty of work to be done north of the Rio Grande. The funniest section of *Idiot* is a selection of priceless quotes titled "Index Expurgatorius Latinoamericanus," including this one from Abbie Hoffman:

"Fidel sits on the side of a tank rumbling into Havana on New Year's Day.... Girls throw flowers at the tank and rush to tug playfully at his black beard. He laughs joyously and pinches a few rumps....The tank stops in the city square. Fidel lets the gun drop to the ground, slaps his thighs and stands erect. He is like a mighty penis coming to life, and when he is tall and straight, the crowd immediately is transformed."

There are millions of Cubans today who also compare Fidel to a penis, albeit in a somewhat different context. Surely we owe them a *Guide to the Perfect North American Idiot.*

Contributing Editor Glenn Garvin (ggarvin @ibw.com.ni) covers Central America for the Miami Herald.

Strands of Life

By Ronald Bailey

Genome: The Autobiography of a Species in 23 Chapters, by Matt Ridley, New York: HarperCollins, 344 pages, $26.00

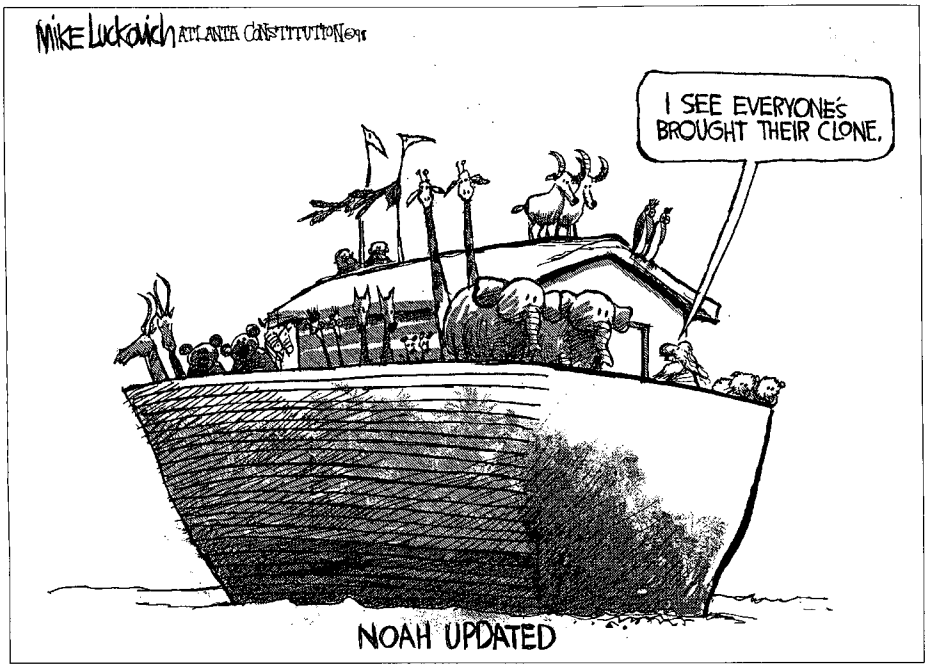
The race to find and map all human genes will likely end this year. This is years ahead of the original schedule set by the government-funded Human Genome Project, but stiff competition from the private sector, particularly from Celera Genomics, is now setting the pace of scientific discovery. Celera announced in April that it had completed the sequencing phase of an individual human being's genome and had now begun to assemble the genome segments into their proper order. In other words, Celera has completely read all of the 3.2 billion DNA base pairs that make up a person's genome.

The four DNA bases—adenine, thymine, cytosine, and guanine (ATCG)—combine into 64 three-letter genetic "words" called "codons" that specify a set of 20 amino acids and three "stop" signals. These amino acids, when linked together by reading the DNA that form the various genes, create the thousands of different proteins that make up the human body. These billions of DNA bases are located on 23 pairs of chromosomes which are harbored in nearly every human cell. Such genetic information is really packed into us: If all of the DNA in a single human cell were stretched out, it would reach six feet in length.

By the time you read this, both Celera and the Human Genome Project likely will have completed draft versions of the human genome. What's more, Celera is sequencing the genomes of six men and women of differing ethnic backgrounds to find single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs). The SNPs are single-letter variations in genes that differ among people and that determine, among other things, susceptibility to disease and the ability to combat illness. The British Wellcome Trust and various pharmaceutical companies are also searching for SNPs by funding an "SNP Consortium" that plans to identify at least 300,000, and perhaps as many as 1,000,000, of the most common SNPs in human populations.

The speed with which all this is happening is fantastic. Just consider what has happened in half a year. In the December issue of *Nature*, the Human Genome Project published the genetic sequence of the first human chromosome to be fully mapped, chromosome 22. Chromosome 22 contains 545 known genes and perhaps as many as 1,000 in total. Some 27 human maladies, including one involved with schizophrenia, are linked to changes in genes on chromosome 22.

In March, Celera, working with the Berkeley *Drosophila* Genome Project, pub-



lished the complete genome of that most important genetic research animal, the fruit fly *Drosophila melanogaster*. (Because fruit flies have relatively large, easy-to-see chromosomes and multiply so quickly, scientists have long used them to track genetic processes.) Writing in *Science*, the researchers identified nearly 14,000 genes, making the fruit fly genome the largest so far sequenced. The fruit fly is also the first insect and the first organism with a central nervous system to be sequenced. (The genomes of several bacteria and the nematode worm *C. elegans* had been sequenced earlier.) In April, the Human Genome Project announced that it had assembled "working drafts" of human chromosomes 5, 16, and 19. Working drafts mean that 90 percent of the DNA in the three chromosomes have been "read" at least five times. Each reading—or, if you will, each spell-checking—increases the accuracy of the sequences; reading a sequence 10 times is considered necessary for complete accuracy.

In the May *Nature*, the Human Genome Project published the complete sequence for the smallest human chromosome, chromosome 21. Chromosome 21 contains only 225 genes, but those genes are important: Inheriting three copies of the chromosome causes Down Syndrome, the most common form of mental retardation, affecting one out of every 700 live births.

Based on the gene frequencies found on chromosomes 21 and 22, some researchers now believe that the total number of genes that it takes to make a human being might be as few as 40,000, rather than the 70,000 to 140,000 predicted earlier. In fact, there is now a betting pool among genomic scientists as to exactly how many genes go into human beings. (The bets cost $1 per guess this year, $5 next year, and $20 in 2002.) The result will be officially announced in 2003, on the 50th anniversary of the publication of James Watson and Francis Crick's famous double-helix paper, which first described the structure of DNA.

Because so much exciting progress is being made in genomic research, one wants a sure guide to help one understand where the science is going. Fortunately, that guide is at hand: Matt Ridley's excellent *Genome: The Autobiography of a Species in 23 Chapters*. Ridley, a zoologist and former American editor for *The Economist*, is both a knowledgeable scientist and an easy-to-read writer. Each of his chapters tours one of our 23 chromosome pairs, the structures inside our cells' nuclei on which our genes are located. By focusing on a particular gene at a time, Ridley is able to illustrate how genes cause disease, direct the production of proteins, or influence intelligence.

For example, the gene for the devastating disease Huntington's chorea is found on chromosome 4. It is not known what a "healthy" version of the gene does, but it contains a single codon, CAG (cytosine, adenine, and guanine), which is repeated as few as six times or as many as 100. "Your destiny, your sanity and your life hang by the thread of this repetition," explains Ridley. When the CAG codon is repeated 35 times or fewer, there is no disease, but if the repetition is higher, inevitable madness looms. "The age at which madness will appear depends strictly and implacably on the number of repetitions of the word CAG in one place in one gene. If you have thirty-nine, you will have a ninety per cent probability of dementia by age 75 and will on average get the first symptoms at sixty-six; if forty, on average you will succumb at fifty-nine; if forty-one, at fifty-four; if forty-two, at thirty-seven; and so on until those who have fifty repetitions of the word will lose their minds at roughly twenty-seven years of age," writes Ridley. "The scale is this: if your chromosomes were long enough to stretch around the equator, the difference between health and insanity would be less than one extra inch." Ridley points out that since 1986 there has been a test for Huntington's, but only 20 percent of people at risk have chosen to take it.

The news, of course, is not always bad. Looking at chromosome 6, researcher Robert Plomin has found that children with high IQs—around 160—are twice as likely as the general population to have a slightly different version of the IGF2R gene. IGF2R is associated with insulin-like proteins and may have an effect on how a person burns glucose to produce energy in the body. It is not obviously a gene for intelligence, but according to Ridley, "it is perhaps relevant that another study has found that people with high IQs are more efficient at using glucose in their brains." The IGF2R variant apparently can add four points to your IQ. Plomin believes that he has identified perhaps 10 other "intelligence genes." While Ridley points out that "no study of the causes of intelligence has failed to find a substantial heritability," he also notes that untangling environmental from genetic influences on intelligence is impossible. "You inherit not your IQ but your ability to develop a high IQ under

MIKE LUCKOVICH

certain environmental circumstances," he concludes.

One of the more fascinating discoveries made by genomic researchers is that "ninety-seven percent of our genome does not consist of true genes at all. It consists of a menagerie of strange entities called pseudogenes, retropseudogenes, satellites, minisatellites, microsatellites, transposons, and retrotransposons: all collectively known as 'junk DNA.'"

For example, our genome contains the nearly complete genomes of several thousand viruses that infected our ancestors and then hitched a permanent ride in our bodies. Unlike viruses for the common cold or those associated with AIDS, human endogenous retroviruses no longer bother with the tedious effort involved in infecting and taking over cells. They've instead taken up cozy residence inside our cells and they "infect" other human beings simply by being passed along from parents to children the same way hair and eye color are.

Another parasitic form of DNA is retrotransposons. One version, known as LINE-1, is essentially a gene that instructs your genome to make and insert more of itself in your genome. LINE-1 comprises 14.6 percent of the entire human genome —making it five times more common than actual genes. "Approximately thirty-five per cent of human DNA consists of various forms of selfish DNA, which means that replicating our genes takes thirty-five per cent more energy than it need," writes Ridley. "Our genomes badly need worming."

Genomic research is also illuminating such questions as, How does a fertilized egg organize itself into something as complex as a human being? A good part of the answer lies on chromosome 12. A crucial breakthrough in developmental genetics occurred in the 1970s, when two German scientists working with fruit flies found a series of eight genes lying together on the same chromosome; these were later called "Hox genes."

"What is truly strange," writes Ridley, "was that each of the eight genes affected a different part of the fly and they were lined up *in the same order as the part of the fly they affected.* The first gene affected the mouth, the second the face, the third the top of the head, the fourth the neck, the fifth the thorax, the sixth the front half of the abdomen, the seventh the rear half of the abdomen, and the eighth various other parts of the abdomen." To appreciate how odd this was, explains Ridley, one must appreciate how random the locations of genes usually are: "[T]here is very little rhyme or reason for where a gene lies. Sometimes it needs to be close to certain other genes. But it is surely rather literal of Mother Nature to lay these homeotic genes out in the order of their use."

As important, it turns out that each of the genes contains the same bit of a "text" that is always 180 "letters" long. Now known as the "homeobox," this information "is the bit by which the protein made by the gene attaches to a strand of DNA to switch on or off another gene. All homeotic genes are genes for switching other genes on or off," explains Ridley. Such genes essentially tell other genes to get to work on making heads, abdomens, and tails. If the head homeotic gene fails to switch on the cascade of genes that construct the head, then the animal won't develop a head.

Ridley investigates the long, sorry history of eugenics. He documents not only well-known Nazi attitudes but also those of Fabian socialists, including H.G. Wells, John Maynard Keynes, and George Bernard Shaw.

Having identified the homeobox segment, researchers searched for it in other organisms. Mice, it turns out, have 4 clusters of Hox genes, which are laid out in the same head-to-tail way as they are in the fruit fly. Humans have the same Hox clusters as mice, one of which is located on chromosome 12. Interestingly, the first gene in line is the first one to be expressed followed in temporal order by the others. "All animals develop from the bow to stern ...At the level of embryology we are glorified flies," jokes Ridley. "The evolutionary implication is that we are descended from a common ancestor with flies which used the same way of defining the pattern of the embryo more than 530 million years ago, and that the mechanism is so good that all this dead creature's descendants have hung onto it."

Ridley explores how genomic research will eventually help doctors treat heart disease, cancer, dementia, arthritis, diabetes, and other diseases. For example, a defect in the ADA gene on chromosome 20 causes severe combined immune deficiency (SCID), which renders the sufferer incapable of fighting off infections. Originally, researchers thought that SCID could be cured if the normal gene could somehow be inserted into a patient's genome. In a pioneering experiment in 1990, French Anderson and Michael Blaese used genetically engineered retroviruses to deliver normal ADA genes to a 3-year-old girl. Her immune response improved somewhat, though not completely. In late April, French scientists reported that two infants suffering from another type of SCID were developing normal immune systems after normal genes were introduced into their bone marrow using genetically modified viruses. Gene therapy may have its first unqualified success.

Ridley is not only good at explaining the science, but is also sound on policy. Unlike so many other authors of books on genetic science, he doesn't waste a lot of time decrying the supposed ethical conundrums posed by scientific progress. He crisply dismisses ethical concerns about the type of gene therapy that cures diseases like SCID. "It is just another form of therapy and nobody who has watched a friend or relative go through chemotherapy or radiotherapy for cancer would begrudge them, on far-fetched safety grounds, the comparatively painless possibility of gene therapy instead," he asserts.

Ridley also investigates the long, sorry history of eugenics. He documents not only well-known Nazi attitudes on the subject but also those of the Fabian socialists, including H.G. Wells, John Maynard Keynes, and George Bernard Shaw. They all believed, notes Ridley, in "the urgent

need to stop stupid or disabled people from breeding." H.G. Wells was particularly creepy, writing, "It has become apparent that whole masses of human population are, as a whole, inferior in their claim upon the future. To give them equality is to sink to their level, to protect and cherish them is to be swamped by their fecundity." Wells did have a touch of compassion in him, however. "All such killing," he insisted, "will be done with an opiate." Ridley concludes his discussion of eugenics by insisting on a distinction ignored by many who indiscriminately inveigh against all forms of genetic manipulation. "Many modern accounts of the history of eugenics present it as an example of the dangers of letting science, genetics especially, out of control," he writes. "It is much more an example of the danger of letting government out of control."

Such clear thinking is particularly valuable on a topic that often gives rise to muddy arguments. Indeed, *Genome* disappoints on only one count: It was written at the dawn of an enormously important era. As exciting as the news about genetic research has already been and will certainly be later this year, it will be even more breathtaking over the next few decades. According to Steve Fodor, president of the biotechnology company Affymetrix, "Ninety-nine percent of people don't have an inkling about how fast this revolution is coming." To Matt Ridley's credit, readers of *Genome* will have far more than an inkling.

Ronald Bailey (rbailey@reason.com) is REASON*'s science correspondent and the editor of* Earth Report 2000: Revisiting the True State of the Planet *(McGraw-Hill).*

It's the Story, Stupid

By Steve Kurtz

Which Lie Did I Tell?: More Adventures in the Screen Trade, by William Goldman, New York: Pantheon Books, 485 pages, $26.95

Hollywood spends a lot of time trying to figure out The Formula—the way to tell a story guaranteed to entertain an audience. I don't know what the big deal is: The French playwright Eugene Scribe discovered it over 150 years ago. During an amazingly successful 50-year career, Scribe churned out 374 theatrical pieces, almost all of which followed the same storytelling rules. Basically, the hero should find himself in more and more difficult situations as the story unfolds. Near the end, there should be *peripeteia* (a reversal of fortune during which the hero hits his lowest point) followed by a *scène à faire* (the moment all the action has been leading up to, where the hero's luck changes and he triumphs over his enemy).

Unfortunately, this sort of formula fell into disrepute in the 20th century and these secrets were left to decay, with a few writers stumbling on them in each new generation. Top screenwriter William Goldman has discovered—and rediscovered—some of the rules of storytelling, and he spreads the gospel in his latest work, *Which Lie Did I Tell?* The book is wide-ranging but always returns to the main message, repeated on the last page: "After writing movies for thirty-five years I am more convinced than ever it's only about story." *It's only about story*: That slogan summarizes both the book's virtues and its one sizable flaw. While many of the best and most popular American films follow Goldman's precepts, he writes as if his narrow, big-budget Hollywood aesthetic is universal. This can cut out the high—a pause in the story for a moment of beauty, or a deeper look into a character—and the low—pure silliness, or an outrageous gag put in not because it fits but because it's fun. But the high-pressure, multimillion-dollar movie business is Goldman's milieu, and these hard-earned lessons have served him well there. They should probably serve others, too.

Of course, Goldman notes, there are two parts to getting a story on the screen. Writing well is only half the game. One must also get around the obstacles—fearful producers, power-mad directors, egotistical stars—who will either reject your script or change it beyond recognition. (Producers, directors, and stars, needless to say, have a different take on just who drags down quality, but this is a writer's book.) Therefore, Goldman spends as much time detailing phone calls and meetings and shoots as he does analyzing screenplays: If you want to succeed, you have to know about both.

But I'm getting ahead of myself (another well-worn writing trick—start in the middle and reveal the backstory as you go along). In 1983, Goldman put out a great book on his life and work in the movies, *Adventures in the Screen Trade.* Since then, publishing books on screenwriting has become an industry threatening to outgrow screenwriting itself. But one thing sets Goldman's book apart from most of the others: He has actually succeeded in the business, at the very highest level. For the past 35 years he's written a fair number of major Hollywood films, including *The Hot Rock* (1972), *A Bridge Too Far* (1977), *The Princess Bride* (1987), and *Maverick* (1994), as well as two Oscar winners, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) and *All the President's Men* (1976). Sometimes those who can, teach.

The first book had two messages, both simple, instructive, and liberating. First, and most celebrated: Nobody Knows Anything. Everyone claims after the fact that they were sure of each hit's success and each flop's failure, but no one really knows beforehand what will work. Every film ever made had someone—usually a bunch of someones—who thought it would succeed. Yet most fail.

The second message was less remembered but equally important: Screenplays Are Structure. Good screenwriters have to discover the spine of the story and stick to it. There's nothing wrong with spending hours finding the *mot juste* to cap off some dialogue, or writing a 50-page biography of every secondary character, but if the basic structure of the story is unsound, the movie won't work.

The new book expands on those two maxims. In other words, it's a sequel. Incidentally, here's what Goldman has to say

about sequels: They're for "whores." I think he's being a little hard on himself—sometimes you simply have more to say.

Which Lie Did I Tell? picks up, chronologically, where the earlier book left off. After having eight scripts made into movies during the '70s—an incredible track record in an industry that buys 30 scripts for every one it actually films—Goldman hit a cold spell from 1980 to 1985, selling no screenplays and not even getting any job offers. (He did manage to write five novels, not to mention *Adventures in the Screen Trade*—we should all have such cold spells.) Knowing that this can happen even to a two-time Oscar winner is as instructive as anything else in the book.

Goldman, as you might expect, slings a good story. His style is very readable. Slangy, a bit profane, and chatty, filled with sentence fragments. You know. Like this. He's willing to name names—if he thinks Spielberg or Lucas are doing something just for the money, he'll say so. The one topic where he's mum is how much he's paid. Perhaps he's reticent because if we knew the huge sums he gets, it would be harder for him to pull off his regular-guy persona.

The book is full of great tales on how a script was written and filmed—or not filmed. For instance, after his years in the wilderness, Goldman was called in to adapt the popular novel *Memoirs of an Invisible Man* for director Ivan Reitman and star Chevy Chase. In the mid-'80s, both were white hot. Unfortunately, Reitman wanted a farce, while Chase wanted a film about the loneliness of invisibility. When two powerful people butt heads, those below often feel it the most, and soon enough Goldman was off the stalled project. (Chase ultimately got his way, and the film was released in 1992, directed by John Carpenter. It was a flop.)

In 1990, Goldman adapted *Misery* from Stephen King's bestseller. The moment in the novel that knocked him out is when the protagonist has his feet lopped off. He wrote it into his script, but director Rob Reiner changed it so the hero "merely" has his ankles broken with a sledgehammer. Goldman screamed, but Reiner wouldn't budge. *Misery* became a hit, and the hobbling scene was the most memorable thing in it. Goldman now admits he was mistaken—his scene did in fact go too far. Why didn't he know it then? Easy: Nobody Knows Anything.

Even some things Goldman claims to know now are uncertain. For example, he believes his lion-hunting film, *The Ghost and the Darkness* (1996), was ruined when star Michael Douglas demanded his part be rewritten. Goldman thinks giving Douglas' character a painful past took away from his mystery and made him more of a whiner. It's impossible to say for sure, but it's hard to believe this relatively minor modification was enough by itself to change the film from hit to failure.

Which Lie Did I Tell? is not all war stories. It also deals with topics ranging from Goldman's favorite scenes in other people's movies to his comments on how well various news stories would adapt into movies to other writers' comments on an uncompleted screenplay by Goldman himself. Holding it all together are several lessons. For one, a writer had better believe in a story before committing to it, because it takes a lot of work to craft a good screenplay. Second, a writer must be willing to take harsh criticism from friends—if they won't tell you the truth, don't expect any mercy from people you're hoping will pay you. And above all, never forget that it all starts with the writer; directors and stars may get more credit, money, and fame, but nothing can happen until someone puts word to page.

Which Lie Did I Tell? is a sequel to the author's _Adventures in the Screen Trade_. Here's what William Goldman has to say about sequels: They're for "whores." I think he's being a little hard on himself—sometimes you simply have more to say.

As central as the writer is to the film, so is the story to the writer. But if the book has a significant lapse, it's that Goldman has been writing big-budget pieces for so long that his idea of a story is a *Hollywood* story. There should be no wasted motion, no matter how entertaining—every line, every action, has to fit into the larger structure. And there's no room for ambiguity—everything should make the lead look good, because, in Goldman's words, "Stars do not—repeat—*do not play heroes*—stars play *gods*." And while you certainly want good characters, their main purpose is to function well in an entertaining plot.

Now there's good Hollywood and there's bad Hollywood, and Goldman wants good Hollywood, but I'm not sure there's room in his aesthetic for anything else. Goldman himself differentiates between Hollywood and independent films by saying the former "reassures" while the latter "unsettles." That's not necessarily wrong, but another difference may be more important: In a Hollywood movie, everything is there to serve the story. Independent films, on the other hand, often stop to explore a character or a moment without it needing to mean anything bigger.

There's nothing wrong with either ethos. When the interlocking parts of a Hollywood film fall into place in ways you didn't see coming, the movie sings. And when an independent film takes some time out from the demands of the plot, you can have beauty. But done poorly, the Hollywood film can seem mechanical, the independent film boring.

But Goldman doesn't even seem aware that a Hollywood filmmaker could go for anything other than what he prescribes. This is odd, since he started working in Hollywood in a period, the late '60s and early '70s, when many mainstream films were loosely structured, even experimental. It wasn't unusual then to start with interesting characters and let their natural interaction be the plot. Blockbusters like *Star Wars* (1977) changed how Hollywood does business, but Goldman, who feels such movies are cartoonish, would nevertheless limit films to basic and formulaic rules of his own.

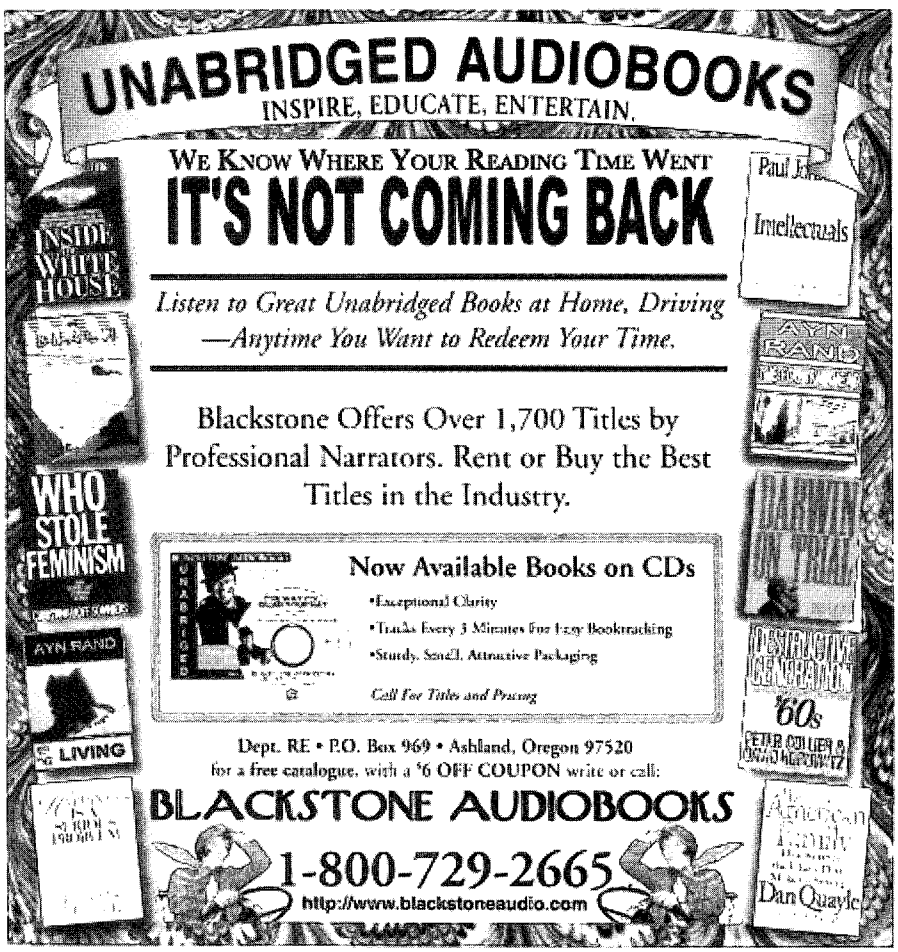
How many times in a Hollywood film do we see something that seems like an in-

teresting character touch only for it to become a mechanical plot point? If you're introduced to a character performing magic tricks for kids in the park, you may think it's a nice grace note, but by the third act, you can bet she's gonna use her talents to get out of a scrape. Even ideas that were once exciting or fun become clichés. If the cops have the bad guy's house surrounded and they're about to make a bust, check your watch. If it's only an hour into the film, either it's the wrong place or the bad guy has already gone and the house is booby-trapped. Or if the film is almost over, and a villain (but not the chief villain) has the hero at gunpoint, out of nowhere a shot will suddenly ring out. The hero's friend or girlfriend (whom we're supposed to have forgotten about) just saved the day. Often, the villain will obligingly fall out of frame so we can see this character, still aiming the smoking gun.

Goldman recognizes the hazard of predictability. As he puts it, a good story should be both satisfying and surprising. (Maybe all art should.) But what Goldman doesn't see is that putting in something beautiful or fun, without a larger purpose, can work. Films such as *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Trainspotting* (1995), and *Being John Malkovich* (1999) break plenty of rules—characters aren't conventionally sympathetic, plot twists aren't "properly" prepared for—but they have such constant invention and lively dialogue that they're better than all but a handful of Hollywood products. On the other hand, countless action films have followed the template of *Die Hard* (1988) and have mostly been bad copies of a good formula.

While no one knows for sure what works, they know from experience that leading viewers down blind alleys, or losing story momentum, usually doesn't. But sometimes the rules can be broken and something new and exciting can emerge. If Goldman had discussed these anomalies—whether he likes them or not—he'd have presented a wider view of what screenplays can be about.

Still, the book is a worthy successor to *Adventures in the Screen Trade.* Ultimately, it *does* come down to story. It's just that any given formula can get you only so far. Eugene Scribe had a formula and wrote more hits than virtually any other play-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wright in history. Yet it is other writers who knew Scribe's style but used it to delve deep into the human soul, like Ibsen, or turned it on its head to mock conventional notions, like Shaw, who are remembered —and performed—today.

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Grand Inquisitor

By Michael Young

Reflections on a Ravaged Century, by Robert Conquest, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 317 pages, $26.95

It is in the latter part in Evelyn Waugh's novel *Officers and Gentlemen* (1955) that Guy Crouchback, his disillusionment with the Second World War swiftly mounting, recalls reading "of the Russo-German alliance, when a decade of shame seemed to be ending in light and reason, when the Enemy was plain in view, huge and hateful, all disguise cast off; the modern age in arms."

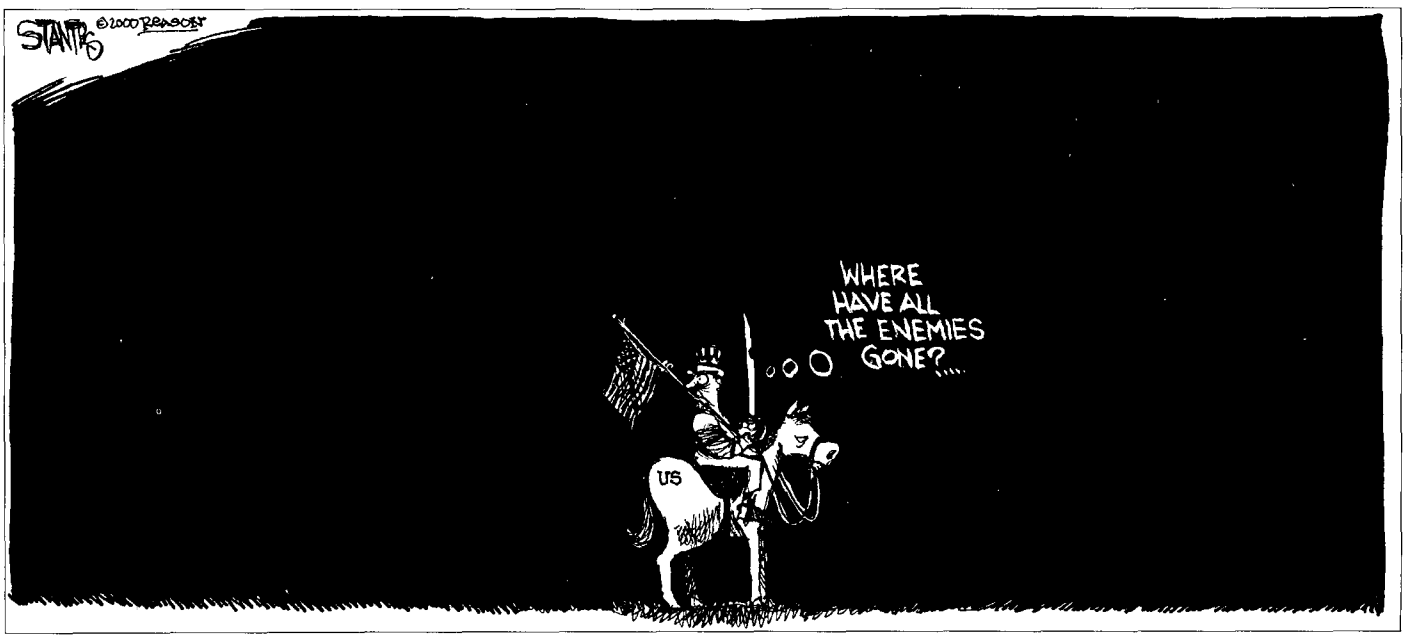
For Crouchback, as indeed for Waugh himself, there was something indecent in the Allies' embrace of the U.S.S.R. after Hitler two-timed Stalin. For where there was Stalin there was no God, a point rather more important to the Catholic Waugh than to the utilitarian practitioners of the balance of power who reckoned that wars are won by men, and that Stalin had a great number to offer. Yet Crouchback's ruminations go beyond Catholic spite: Inherent in his thoughts is a striving for a middle ground between the opposing, if never opposite, poles of Nazism and Communism, where the notion of "just war" has meaning, and where an enemy is, reassuringly, unambiguously, the Enemy.

In his most recent book, *Reflections on a Ravaged Century*, eminent historian Robert Conquest often comes across as a latter-day Crouchback. Conquest is someone in perpetual search of the reasonable middle, at ease with the customary—those habits and principles born of experience. After decades spent in dogged investigation of the Soviet Union's more extravagant crimes, Conquest now launches an assault against the tyranny of abstract Ideas, those vindicating the forcible, unnatural shaping of human actions.

More often than not in the past century such Ideas were born of a ruinous conceit "that utopia can be constructed on earth." Conquest's favored path is the evolutionary, not the revolutionary, whose practitioners, in their inability to entertain alternatives, seek to impose dogma through the systematic dismantling of rival beliefs, and, too often, murder. This impulse Conquest describes using a most effective neologism: *mindslaughter.*

Yet this forms only part of Conquest's meditations, which collectively make up a curious book. *Reflections* is, in fact, three things: a retrospective, as the title suggests, allowing Conquest to assess, once again, the devastation wrought by ideological excess during the 20th century; an impertinent, at times myopic, interpretation of the global *Zeitgeist* from someone with a hefty reservoir of outrage; and a pamphlet, with the last segment of the book devoted to pleading the case for a new trans-oceanic, English-speaking association of states.

In his philosophical approach and in the intellectual markers that he employs, Conquest seems an anachronism. His accounts of ideological confrontations past, which make up a sizable portion of *Reflections*, may strike younger readers as vintage Cold War posturing. Some may find themselves magnanimously agreeing that Conquest, now in his 80s, should be given his say. After all, he is one of the few who surveyed the gamut of volatile transactions between the U.S.S.R. and the West, and who emerged from the fracas with the



verdict of history leaning considerably in his favor. Yet giving Conquest his say need not mean finding him relevant to what lies ahead. Like Alexander Solzhenitsyn, some may conclude, Conquest has outlived his time.

But such a conclusion would be tantamount to admitting that Ideas no longer affect societies. In fact, Ideas, however vacuous, persist. Conquest is not solely concerned with the mass killings of totalitarian regimes. As he sees it, all-embracing Ideas are everywhere present, and are considered an essential ingredient in innovation. Where Conquest parts ways with the innovators, however, is when they seek to demolish what already exists. His major contemporary example of such behavior? Something as apparently benign as European unity, with its "excessive stress on easily graspable, or generally fine-sounding, ideas and too little on the real structure of our cultures."

Culture is a recurring motif in Conquest's arguments. His obsession is with societies' details, those particulars of cultural expression that partisans of all-embracing Ideas need to expunge in order to triumph. In a recent article in *The Atlantic Monthly*, a contributing editor of *The Nation*, D.D. Guttenplan, wrote of his encounter with Raul Hilberg, the Holocaust historian. Hilberg, defending the importance of accurate estimates of deaths in his research, remarked: "There is ultimately, if you don't want to surrender to nihilism entirely, the matter of a record. Does the record matter? In my judgment it is not discussible. It is not arguable." Conquest, who spent much time having to defend his death figures in *The Great Terror*, would agree. Without the sanctity of facts, to use Guttenplan's expression, without a record, without memory, what would societies be left holding?

Hovering over *Reflections* as a sustaining spirit is George Orwell. The theme and tone of Conquest's arguments suggest why. Orwell understood the benefits of experience. Never satisfied with mere commentary, he felt an urge to report on his subjects, to become part of them. For *Down and Out in Paris and London*, Orwell lived as a tramp; he dwelled among the miners of northern England to write the first part of *The Road to Wigan Pier*. *Homage to Catalonia*, the third in his triptych of *reportages*, was on the Spanish civil war and was written after a stint in the POUM militia, an escapade that nearly cost Orwell his life.

Conquest also sees in Orwell an early and heroic inquisitor of totalitarianism. This was no armchair activity in the 1930s, when much of the European intelligentsia was red, with avid concentrations of brown and black. Even today, Orwell incites polemics. Most recently he stood accused of having provided a list of communist sympathizers to Celia Kirwan, an employee at Britain's Foreign Office's Information Research Department, which had ties to MI6. An angry riposte came from Christopher Hitchens, who pointed out in the *London Review of Books* that Orwell's supposed "list" was open, shown to friends, and was included in a quarto notebook at home. Therefore, it could hardly have been prepared by someone "in the service of the secret state."

As it happens, one of Kirwan's colleagues at the Information Research Department was Robert Conquest. That is why the attacks directed against Orwell must also, somewhere, find Conquest as well. They share much: a willingness to subvert conventional wisdom, despite the backlash, if it is shown to be spurious; a disdain for the sanctity of ideology if it violates the better judgments of common sense; and an impulse to focus on people rather than on systems when considering political behavior, since psychological asylum among impersonal forces has habitually been used to alleviate the import of the more monumental human abominations.

A nagging problem in reading *Reflections* is finding just where the boundary lies between Conquest's frequent appeals to a public common sense safe from intellectual narcissism, and an inherent anti-intellectual populism. Conquest frequently adopts the same lines of attack employed by dime-store demagogues the world over. That is undoubtedly where the link ends, but it is alarming when even thoughtful Burkean conservatives such as Conquest should find themselves so exotically accompanied.

First, common sense. In describing the current schools of art, Conquest writes: "There is no execution unless at a very low and mechanical level. And this is even praised as 'conceptual.' That is, there is no 'artistry' that a bricklayer—or a butcher and a glazier—could not do, assuming they could spare time from their more useful occupations." For Conquest, current art schools, because of their desire to establish closed, unchallenged hierarchies of values and authority, develop art that is inaccessible to the public, which thirsts for skill. In order to justify what Conquest considers an absence of skill—and what art schools would call "conceptual originality"—an intellectual or ideological gloss must be produced, hence a gatekeeper. The stultifying (and eroding) power of art gatekeepers has been a theme repeatedly discussed in REASON, as well as by the likes of Tom Wolfe, most recently in an article on the artist Frederick Hart in *The New York Times Magazine*. Conquest's instinct to tear at the hollow esoterica sustaining artistic hierarchies is sound, even if, paradoxically, in the back of his mind he accepts an aesthetic ideal set by gatekeepers past.

Conquest's drift into a more cursory populism, appears, oddly for a historian, in a discussion on the international system. In a chapter on nations, he writes: "The world can be seen as containing evolved nation-states and states which, even if in some cases ethnically or territorially based, are not yet mature components of an international order." And then, "there are what amount to pirate states, in effect not recognizing (though sometimes constrained to observe) any rules of international behavior: Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Libya and so on." And these "have to be coped with urgently over the interim, but in the long or medium run a really sustainable international order is possible only on a basis of adequate nations and national states."

There are two problems here, one semantic, the other conceptual. The words *evolved*, *mature*, and *adequate* are subjective, yet they presume a priori, objective agreement on their meaning. The criticism is hardly a plea for watered-down relativity: No one can avoid *feeling*, for example, that Somalia—the example is Conquest's —is at a somewhat earlier stage of national evolution than Switzerland, whatever that may mean. But who formally determines such things? When one resorts to the con-

cept of "adequate nations," there is a discernible sense that someone, somewhere is handing out certificates to those deemed *fréquentable.* There is a gatekeeper here, and Conquest fails to explain who it is, though anyone can guess.

Then there are those exasperating "pirate states." The "and so on" Conquest tags onto his gallery of rogues is a tad self-defeating, as it implies roughly the same blamelessness as "the usual suspects." It also speaks to a peculiar mindset prevalent in the mid-1980s, when "terrorism experts" roamed the corridors of Washington in search of handouts to finance their ghoulish pseudo-science. That Conquest should find himself in such company is deplorable.

The problem is that he never really considers the innate abrasiveness of America's global reach. One needn't alight from the left to see that America is the main enforcer of a global status quo, that the ensuing equilibrium often favors it, and that this situation produces disturbing inconsistencies: Turkey can murder its Kurds, but Iraq cannot; Israel and Pakistan can possess atomic weapons, but Iran and North Korea cannot; Russia can ruthlessly crush a domestic national insurrection, but Serbia cannot.

One hastens to append a disclaimer: Avoid drawing policy guidelines from such sophistry. The depravities of some states need not imply that all should be allowed to abuse their powers until universal consistency is imposed. Yet by sidestepping frustration with America's global conduct, by accepting without dissent "we and they" categorizations, Conquest takes the easy route, one that will appeal to those who assume that an international Pax Americana is absolutely divine.

That's a pity because Conquest is, at least culturally, ecumenical: He is ever mindful and tolerant of the effect cultural variances have on political and economic systems. Yet for a rare instance in *Reflections* we hear the fighter-bombers on a sortie against the pirate state's nerve center, in the background the grunting acquiescence of a Rush Limbaugh.

One of the more engaging sections of *Reflections* shows Conquest lashing out at the aberration of European unity. Europe, he reminds us, is just another Idea, one that has spawned a tentacular bureaucracy and that seeks to impose on the divergent European states a counterfeit uniformity. Conquest does a service in bringing the debate back to the realm of culture and politics, since the aficionados of Europe mainly use economic arguments to justify what is at heart a political and cultural phenomenon.

Conquest writes, "It might be argued that real knowledge of, even affection for, continental Europe makes one reject a light-minded and premature political unity." What Conquest apparently desires —and the key word here is affection—is a genuine harmony of interests built against the backdrop of a time-tested, historical understanding of Europe's cultural and political diversity.

Hovering over *Reflections* as a sustaining spirit is George Orwell. And Orwell, like Conquest, understood the benefits of experience.

Where Conquest is unconvincing is in his determination that Europe is "a bloc hindering the development of free trade, being from the global point of view a large-scale special interest (or set of special interests)." Because of this, he continues, the European Union has divided the West and is "in effect anti-American."

The implications are fascinating: Conquest posits a transnational Western interest, but avoids inquiring whether this may, perchance, also represent a "large-scale special interest" of the kind which might hinder free trade. Nor would devotees of the free market understand what is wrong with special interests, since the moment grander motivations, such as Western unity, are injected into the marketplace, there is a distinct possibility that ideology will follow.

To Europe, Conquest prefers a structure which "would be natural rather than artificial, going with the cultural grain rather than cutting across it." His proposal is for an association of English-speaking countries—the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, perhaps Ireland (if the restive Irish agree), the nations of the Caribbean and the Pacific, and maybe a few more. One hesitates to repeat that this too may emerge as a special interest group, though the accusation of divisiveness is easily dispensed with: Conquest considers his Association the first step in the formation of a grander global collectivity bringing together democratic countries. It is too early to outline the degree of unity in such a congregation, Conquest explains, but it would be stronger than an alliance and weaker than a federation.

What is one to make of what seems a harebrained idea? Conquest's tone may suggest to some readers that he is endorsing the notion of a "clash of civilizations." The accusation would be unfair. For Conquest to argue that a "united and peaceful world" is possible suggests that he has a far less Hobbesian worldview than those who believe in the inevitability of cultural antagonism. Indeed one would have thought less fanciful a man who spent such time counting bodies. Yet Conquest's proposal is not self-evidently insensible—unity is always easier, and preferable, among those of like minds and habits.

However, one wonders what would really happen if transnational, culturally homogenous communities begin forming on every side. Would the result be unity and peace, or conflict on an ever grander scale? Nowhere does Conquest explain what mechanism would drive international unification.

It is to Conquest's credit that he casually opens himself up to such reproof. For if his distaste is for transcendent Ideas, he very much fancies the free exchange of ideas. *Reflections* echoes to the sounds of a thousand controversies, past and future, which Conquest so engagingly distributes as possible guides out of the intellectual labyrinth at this rotation of century. One need not follow his path, nor does Conquest impose one. His is a more benign tyranny: It merely requires a clarification of one's own thoughts. ◆

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Cybersilly

By Brian Doherty

Cyberselfish: A Critical Romp Through the Terribly Libertarian Culture of High-Tech, by Paulina Borsook, New York: PublicAffairs, 267 pages, $24.00

This is a bad book, unlearned in its titular subject, petulant, and poorly argued. It is tempting simply to dismiss it and move on. Despite its shoddy quality, however, *Cyberselfish: A Critical Romp Through the Terribly Libertarian Culture of High-Tech* is not irrelevant. Far from it. The book is fascinating as a case study in the reasoning and psychology behind opposition to the mix of individualism and anti-statism that characterizes contemporary libertarian thought.

Borsook was a regular contributor to *Wired* magazine during its start-up period in the early-to-mid-1990s. During that time, she became alarmed at what she saw as the undue influence of libertarian thinking at the magazine and in the world it covered. As the dominant thought leader for computer industry culture, she suggests, *Wired* was a powerful vector for the libertarian "plague" or "parasite" (two metaphors Borsook uses for libertarian thinking at different points in the book). "It's worth trying to tease out what these mostly American, mostly West Coast inventors and programmer-droids and plutocrats are up to—for they have the big bucks, and cultural juice, that will be affecting us all as we head into the next millennium," she writes.

Borsook took her first swipe at the topic in a 1996 *Mother Jones* article. As an extension of that lament about the supposed dominance of libertarian thinking in the high-tech world, *Cyberselfish* can expect a sympathetic audience. Most intellectuals, after all, are not simply unlibertarian but actively hostile to libertarianism. They don't agree with the philosophy's vision of a state restricted to the protection of its citizens' lives and property (if that much—anarcho-capitalists sail under the libertarian banner as well).

What's more, most intellectuals tend to think there's something untoward about anyone who does embrace the libertarian philosophy. At best, goes this line of thought, such people are tools of moneyed interests. At worst, they are inhuman, atomistic drones. And while most Americans express sympathy for generally stated libertarian tenets (abstract visions of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are A-OK), that sympathy tends to wear thin when rubbed against the sharper edge of specific policy applications (What do you mean, shut down the FDA?).

Borsook throws around enough names to suggest a knowledge of libertarianism, but it's clear she doesn't know that much about the political philosophy she's attacking. She cites Friedrich Hayek, for instance, but misspells his first name and gives a ludicrously reductive reading of *The Road to Serfdom*'s critique of planning. "All government intervention of course," she summarizes, "irresistibly lead[s] to Stalinesque collectivization of farms." Similarly, she mistakenly identifies Ludwig von Mises as the inventor of anarcho-capitalism. (Mises was no anarchist.) She mentions Murray Rothbard, the actual intellectual father of 20th-century anarcho-capitalism, to say that he borrowed the idea from Mises and then adds, in a bizarre footnote, "Who knows if it was a conscious choice."

Borsook references Harry Browne, the Libertarian Party's presidential candidate in 1996, and claims the L.P. "routinely" nominates him for high office. (So far, they've done so exactly once, though they may well do it a second time this summer.) She says the Cato Institute was founded a decade before it actually was and that the Scaife Foundation was one of its original funders. (Cato existed four years before getting any Scaife money, and Scaife is mentioned just to gratuitously hang Ken Starr around Cato's neck.) She brings up REASON, in order to claim that Editor-at-Large Virginia Postrel is used as a "Token Girl" at overly male and sexist computer-world conferences.

For all the names she drops, Borsook doesn't seem to know what issues are actually the dominant concerns of libertarian writers and institutions—drug laws, education, foreign policy, and trade all go unmentioned. She has only the vaguest idea of the theoretical and empirical reasons why libertarians think what they do—not even enough to argue with them.

If Borsook were your only guide, you wouldn't think there was any economic or philosophical reasoning, any history or logic on which libertarianism is based. The only apparent motivation is a snotty adolescent attitude among geeks, who have a "wicked excitement about...the Hobbe-

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sian war of all against all." Her technolibertarians suffer from "a kind of scary, psychologically brittle, prepolitical autism." They "make a philosophy out of a personality defect" and, she insists, are disproportionately involved in "programmatic weird sex."

Borsook knows too little to contextualize libertarianism outside high-tech, and thus she equates it with "bionomics," cypherpunks, and George Gilder. Bionomics, a concept set forth by Michael Rothschild in a 1990 book of the same name, holds that, in the broadest terms, economies function like biological systems and can manage themselves. (Rothschild also created The Bionomics Institute, whose popular Bay Area conferences helped define high-tech's character and community.) Cypherpunks are radical opponents of any government restrictions on cryptography. Gilder is the great social-conservative cheerleader for high-tech, and Borsook is mostly interested in the biologically reductionist notions about sex roles and family life he has spun out in books such as *Men and Marriage* (1992), a revision of his earlier *Sexual Suicide.* Gilder is indisputably a high-tech guru, and his books *Life After Television* (1990) and *Telecosm* (2000) extol the liberating potential of technology like nobody's business. But his insistence on traditional male-female roles doesn't exactly play well in Silicon Valley. More important, such ideas have nothing whatsoever to do with libertarianism, techno or otherwise.

No matter—any weapon Borsook can muster to bash the libertarian enemies she sees all about her will do. Hence she mocks *Wired* co-founder Louis Rosetto as a "neo-caveman" for entertaining sociobiological explanations for women's lack of dominance in high-tech, yet offers up feminist researcher Carol Gilligan's similar thinking as a rational explanation for the phenomenon.

Strangely, Borsook herself frequently and frankly brings up the thinness of the factual assertions behind many of her arguments. In a typical moment, she points out that "political scientists who study the demographics of the Net do not find voting patterns that differ much from the world outside" and that political scientists have done *no* work on the intersection of libertarianism and high-tech.

To another author, such facts might be cause for worry. But Borsook bravely pushes on. Even while acknowledging that she meets people in the high-tech world who aggressively *deny* being libertarian and others who claim not even to have heard the word, she nonetheless asserts that almost all techies—the deniers and the ignorant along with those who openly embrace the *libertarian* label—parrot the same simplistic line, her summation of libertarian thinking: "Government bad, market good; someone said it, I believe it, that settles it!"

It isn't so much that Borsook strongly disagrees with every element of the modern libertarian message, though she surely would have problems with much of it if she knew what it was. It's that she considers libertarians *unpleasant people.* They're selfish, asocial, too into Ayn Rand and Robert Heinlein; they indulge in impersonal, perverted sexual games because they can't stand real intimacy. She finds them "nasty, narcissistic, lacking human warmth."

She peppers little insults like this throughout the book, and on some level this book could be seen as a personal lament: "Why is it so hard to meet nice guys in Silicon Valley?" Dotting the book are tales of bad dates with libertarian geeks who make snide remarks about bums and who send her unwanted e-mail, only to get riled when she explains she doesn't believe all that free-market stuff.

Technolibertarians, writes the author of *Cyberselfish*, suffer from "prepolitical autism." They "make a philosophy out of a personality defect" and are disproportionately involved in "programmatic weird sex."

But it isn't clear that Borsook has strong intellectual objections to the "free minds and free markets" matrix that undergirds most of what libertarians say and think. She spends a chapter dissing cypherpunks, for example, chiding them for being overly concerned with government meddling in their lives (she thinks they haven't suffered enough to complain). Yet she agrees with their central goal of halting government interference in the sale, development, and possession of cryptography.

So what is Borsook's case beyond pique, beyond finding Bionomics conferences to be "little shops of horror," beyond lamenting that technolibs prefer Edge Cities to "real" urban centers, beyond finding libertarians "psychically exhausting"? Boiled down, she makes two arguments: First, high-tech people have no right to attack government since their industry would not have existed without government funding. Second, successful businesses are successful because they operate in a world where governments keep schools going, food and drugs pure, banks honest, and the like.

The first argument is simply a non sequitur. Government is involved with just about any commercial transaction or field imaginable, if only because it builds roads. But the fact that the government paves streets hardly makes it responsible for all the businesses that spring up alongside them. (There is, moreover, ample evidence that road building would continue even if government disappeared.)

The Defense Department's role in developing ARPANet, the forerunner to the Internet, was more as a customer than as an engineer creating something by design; it provided money for researchers doing early work on a decentralized computer network, but didn't plan or anticipate anything like the Internet we use today. Indeed, the essentially unplanned way in which the Internet developed is an example of the biologically informed models of growth and self-regulation that libertarians celebrate. It's also worth pointing out that the Internet's huge growth, both in terms of infrastructure and customers, came about due to commercial investment, not government financing.

As for Borsook's second line of attack: Anyone advocating a smaller role for the

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state is by necessity thrust into the realm of historical fantasy, of imagining the way things could be. Government has arrogated so extensive a role to itself that it's understandable that many people might imagine that nothing the government has a hand in could possibly have happened without it.

One of the key insights of libertarianism revolves around the notion of the "spontaneous order," the idea that social orders and markets can, do, and will develop to meet human needs without central direction or control. For instance, just because government has taken it upon itself to finance and run schools does not mean that no one would be educated if it didn't. Nor would restaurants start poisoning their customers if municipal food inspectors disappeared overnight.

But Borsook doesn't understand what libertarians mean when they talk about spontaneous order. Thus she asserts that such a theory of "self-organization" appeals to "engineers' physics envy" and that "the reason for the rise in technolibertarianism is that engineers are practical and like to fix things and get things right, so of course only the sensible political choice of libertarianism would fit."

In fact, the engineering mentality, which presumes a single best way of doing things in accordance with unchanging "natural" laws, is the exact opposite of the spontaneous order mentality that pervades libertarian thinking. That's why Hayek specifically identified the engineering mentality as the mind-set from "which all modern socialism, planning and totalitarianism derives."

But Borsook hasn't thought about libertarian philosophy hard enough to make fine distinctions. To her, anything and everything anti-government—from militiamen obsessed with what they consider a Zionist-Occupied Government to people who want more foreign tech workers than current immigration laws allow—is tossed into the libertarian stew she finds so distasteful.

The root of Borsook's problem—and perhaps of libertarianism's problem with mainstream writers and thinkers—is encoded in her book's title: *Cyberselfish.* She spends most of a chapter musing over the well-known "fact" that people who get wealthy from high-tech are unprecedentedly stingy with their corporate and individual giving. When I presented this thesis to Ann Kaplan, editor of *Giving USA,* one of the prime data collection sources for American philanthropy, she told me there are no accurate macro data to support that contention.

In fact, even the "data" Borsook cites don't support her contention. She notes that the regional United Way goal in Silicon Valley has not increased during the '90s and that, although San Jose has double the average U.S. per capita income, local charities do not receive twice the national average in donations. (She doesn't say how much they *do* receive and doesn't cite any sources for the data.)

Additionally, she notes a survey by the Community Foundation Silicon Valley (CFSV) of area residents across all income lines that indicates they give to charities at a level similar to the national giving rate (about 2 percent of annual income). What's more, in Silicon Valley, "the percentages of those giving in each income bracket are somewhat above national averages."

Such data are her main evidence for the oft-bruited assertion that the high-tech world is uniquely stingy. Borsook simply assumes that Silicon Valley can be equated with the entire high-tech sector and that United Way is a reasonable proxy for all charity. And if you look at the CFSV report that she mentions, you find that 83 percent of Silicon Valley households donate to charity, compared to 69 percent nationally, and that Silicon Valley adults volunteer at a rate exactly equal to the national average (49 percent). But 40 percent of Silicon Valley charitable giving goes outside the immediate area, which might help explain the local United Way situation.

Borsook's problem with an inherent "selfishness" that may not even exist is part of a general negative *feeling* about people who don't want as much government as she does. She doesn't feel spiritually akin to these espousers of libertarianism; their strongly expressed belief in a philosophy she only half-understands but associates with stinginess disturbs her. That kind of sociological prejudice rests on a false supposition, reflected throughout *Cyberselfish,* that "social" and "governmental" are coterminous, and that anyone who is against governmental action is therefore essentially "atomistic." The libertarian insight that the state is the nexus of legalized violence and coercion—and awareness of the special moral and practical dilemmas that its use thus involves—escapes Borsook entirely; she never even mentions it to try to refute it. Ignorant of the philosophical and intellectual background behind small-state thinking, she condemns it for being *against* cooperation. In fact, libertarians rely on uncoerced transactions and charitable fellow-feeling as the web holding civil society together—cooperation on mutually agreed terms at its finest, without force entering the equation.

Why do Borsook and other anti-libertarians miss this? Willful, ideologically motivated blindness no doubt plays a role. But libertarians themselves must share a good deal of the responsibility. In public debate, they should be less negative and spend more time pointing out the ways in which a culture can survive and thrive by relying on spontaneous orders and voluntary exchanges that make all the world richer, cleaner, safer, and saner.

Libertarians can perhaps take some solace that in over 200 pages Borsook fails to make a coherent case against "terribly libertarian culture." But they would do well to rely less on defenses of the right to be left alone, which can be interpreted as mere selfishness and hence something easy to dismiss. Recognizing that may be the key to understanding why so many are likely to agree with Borsook despite her inability to actually prove her case. ◆

Brian Doherty (bdoherty@reason.com) is an associate editor at REASON.

Letters, continued from page 7

And how can any reasonable person claim that severe storms, floods, and droughts aren't getting worse? Has Mr. Bailey forgotten about Hurricane Mitch in the Caribbean 18 months ago? The East Coast devastation from storms and flooding last fall?

Does Mr. Bailey really care about what kind of planet our children and grandchildren inherit, or is his more pressing priority preserving his free market ideology and unrestrained economic growth? He needs to remember that there is a name for unrestrained growth—cancer.

Dan Butts
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Ronald Bailey replies: Thanks to Mr. Nelson for his kind comments. I admit that I, too, initially believed the dire predictions of Ehrlich, Commoner, and other doomsters, but it took me nearly two decades to realize that they had been spectacularly and harmfully wrong.

In response to Ms. Gatwood: Far from overlooking food and population issues, I showed how Paul Ehrlich and other neo-Malthusians were wrong. Hundreds of millions did not starve to death as they predicted. Global food production has certainly affected the natural environment, but modern, high-yield agriculture, by tripling farm productivity since the 1950s, has prevented the plowing down of as much as an additional 10 million square miles (the land area of North America) to produce food for today's population. I don't want to be perceived as claiming that humanity has solved all environmental problems, but I do want to assert that the only way to protect and even extend the area spared for nature is through technological progress and economic growth.

In response to Mr. Andrew: He does have a point with regard to the tragedy of the commons as applied to cleaning up dirty air and polluted rivers and lakes. But bear in mind that the preferred strategy of many environmentalists for cleaning up air and water was stopping economic growth and moving to a steady-state economy. Government regulation—local, state, and federal—has helped clean up both the air and the water in the United States. But why did environmental concerns top the public agenda in the late 20th century? Because only prosperous people are willing to devote wealth to improving environmental amenities.

One can either regulate or privatize environmental commons. Most countries have chosen to regulate and made considerable progress, as discussed in my article. But free market think tanks such as the Competitive Enterprise Institute are now doing some interesting preliminary work on figuring out how to enclose environmental commons such as airsheds, groundwater, and fisheries. If such proposals are adopted, we can expect industry to oppose them, for the same reason they opposed government regulations: They don't want to pay for something they once got for free.

Mr. Vavra thinks Wyoming is suffering from a miniature tragedy of the commons. One can have unlittered shorelines if no one visits a lake, but one can also have them if one pays to keep them clean or encourages visitors (by fines, say) to clean up after themselves. If there are too many hikers on one trail, the Forest Service or Park Service could charge hiking fees to ration use of the trail. As for Jackson Hole, a wag once wisely said that an environmentalist is someone who already has his cabin in the woods. Mr. Vavra would apparently prefer to enjoy solitude without paying for it, or even have other people pay for his solitude. Despite the hullabaloo over sprawl, more and more land is reverting to nature in the United States as farms and ranches are abandoned and Americans move to relatively compact suburbs.

Now to Mr. Butts. Publishers publish Worldwatch's books for the same reason they publish Stephen King or Deepak Chopra: not because they are true, but because they sell.

Mr. Butts makes many scientifically unsubstantiated assertions, relying chiefly on arguments from authority. Let's deal briefly with a few of them. First, if toxics were such a problem one might expect U.S. life expectancy to be decreasing; it continues to increase. Overall cancer incidence and cancer death rates in the United States have been going down since 1990, and both the Food and Drug Administration and the National Research Council have concluded that synthetic chemicals are involved in less than 2 percent of human cancers.

As for POPs, they were not created to pollute the environment but to solve problems. Organochloride pesticides like DDT were a great boon to agriculture as well as to human health by preventing insect-borne diseases. PCBs were superior stable coolants for electrical transformers. Richer societies like ours have decided that many POPs are sufficiently hazardous to wildlife that they can afford to forego the benefits of these synthetic chemicals. But pesticides like DDT still play a vital role in preventing diseases such as malaria in the poorer regions of the world. Is it moral to forbid poor mothers to use DDT to protect their children from malaria in order to save songbirds? Or is it even necessary, since many of those species are rebounding today?

Consumers buy organic foods because they either prefer them or have been misled by environmentalist propaganda. There is no scientific evidence that organic foods are more healthful than conventionally grown foods. Since organic farming is only two-thirds as productive as modern farming, a switch to organic methods would mean plowing down lots of wildlife habitat to provide food for people.

As for animal extinctions, let's look at the data. According to data compiled in 1994 by the World Conservation Union-IUCN, since 1600, 593 animal species (including 368 invertebrates) and 384 vascular plants have gone extinct. Seventy-five percent of these extinctions occurred on oceanic islands. With regard to the alleged disappearance of 50,000 species a year, would Mr. Butts please name 500 of them, or even 50? Those huge numbers are extrapolated from the species/area curve relationship in the increasingly challenged theory of island biogeography.

Despite Mr. Butts' claims, the number of hurricanes is not increasing, nor are they getting fiercer, according to the National Hurricane Center. Hurricane Mitch was a disaster in Honduras and Nicaragua largely because of poverty, poor infrastructure, and the denuding of steep hillsides by subsistence farmers. As for increased weather-related insurance claims, surely Mr. Butts is aware that Florida has had a population boom, as have many other

coastal areas. This means there are more targets for storms to hit. Note than 1,000 Americans died annually in hurricanes between 1900 and 1908, while only 25 died annually between 1988 and 1996, despite huge population increases.

I really do care about what kind of planet future generations will inherit, and I believe Mr. Butts does too. But misdiagnosing problems and advocating bad, though well-meaning, policies will not achieve an environmentally healthy world.

Pay Attention Now

Jason Sholl's review ("Dangerous Distraction," May) of two popular books on attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) illustrates five common pitfalls: the danger of "a little knowledge," quoting out of context, assuming that a disorder does not exist unless its cause is known, confusing treatment and diagnostic issues, and assuming that pathology must be qualitatively (not just quantitatively) different from health.

The mass of literature on ADHD, ranging from solid scientific studies to opinion pieces (and commercial attempts to cash in on the public curiosity), is so huge that it is difficult for any one person to assimilate it all or even to find a balance. In any large body of science, there will be some contradictions and apparent contradictions, including occasional failures to replicate. Deciding whether the positive study or the negative is accurate often depends on time and further study; no single study should be taken as definitive. Consequently, anyone who draws conclusions from a small sampling or quick skim of the literature, especially without reviewing the scientific database, is in danger of error.

An example of Sholl's errors is his statement that *DSM*-IV diagnosis requires six out of a list of 14 symptoms (it is actually six out of either of two lists of nine symptoms, but one cannot add together symptoms from the two lists). Another is the failure to mention that diagnosis also requires impairment in at least two settings, not just the symptoms. Further, no ADHD expert would endorse making (or rejecting) the diagnosis on a 10-minute office observation.

Closely related to the pitfall of limited literature sampling is quoting out of context. For example, Sholl cites the 1998 National Institutes of Health Consensus Conference report, a valid strategy in itself because the consensus panel was composed of scientific experts from outside the ADHD field who had no vested interest. However, he selects only the statement that knowledge about causes "remains speculative." The same report also states, "The diagnosis of ADHD can be made reliably using well-tested diagnostic interview methods....Although research has suggested a central nervous system basis for ADHD, further research is necessary to firmly establish ADHD as a brain disorder. This is not unique to ADHD, but applies as well to most psychiatric disorders, including disabling diseases such as schizophrenia. Evidence supporting the validity of ADHD includes the long-term developmental course..., cross-national studies revealing similar risk factors, familial aggregation...(which may be genetic or environmental), and heritability." The heritability of ADHD from twin, adoption, and other familial studies is over 0.5.

Much of the criticism of the ADHD diagnosis seems based on dislike of the most popular treatment, Ritalin. But we do not deny the existence of cancer just because we dislike its toxic chemotherapy. There are, in fact, numerous other possible treatments for ADHD, some with well-documented efficacy, others with promising pilot data.

Sholl is correct that the symptoms of ADHD are merely frequent or excessive occurrence of behaviors that any normal person might occasionally show. The NIH consensus statement says, "This is not unique to ADHD, as other medical diagnoses, such as essential hypertension and hyperlipidemia, are continuous in the general population, yet the utility of diagnosis and treatment have been proven." Everyone has a blood pressure and temperature. When either exceeds a threshold agreed on by expert clinicians, hypertension or a febrile illness is diagnosed, even if the cause is not known. The appropriate threshold for ADHD symptoms is a subject of continuing deliberation among clinical scientists. The politicization of the diagnosis, by inducing defensiveness, may have a chilling effect on the healthy self-criticism and scientific dialogue needed for further progress in diagnostic accuracy.

Sholl may be correct that some parents bilk the system for Supplemental Security Income payments or other benefits for unimpaired or mildly impaired children; but if so, that is a problem of the welfare system, not of the diagnosis.

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Jason Sholl replies: The medical disorder ADHD and the popular label "ADHD" are both very real phenomena. The difficult question is not whether one or the other exists, but where one ends and the other begins. By discussing ADHD's social and economic aspects, as well as its medical aspects, I tried to convey the full complexity of distinguishing the label from the disease. I do not consider such an approach a "limited literature sampling."

The NIH Consensus Conference report presents an optimistic evaluation of our knowledge about the diagnosis and treatment of ADHD. While my single quote from the report did not reflect this optimism, neither was it taken out of context. I discuss many of the report's other claims, such as "heritability" and "cross-national studies" elsewhere in my review. Similarly, while certain details about *DSM*-IV diagnostic criteria were inaccurate as I presented them, for which I apologize, the point I made remains valid: diagnosing ADHD is a highly subjective affair.

For better or worse, the preferred treatment for ADHD is a drug virtually indistinguishable from cocaine. When we administer such a drug to over 4 million children each year, I fail to see how diagnostic issues can remain separate from treatment issues. The overprescription of Ritalin and the perverse incentives surrounding ADHD diagnosis are not problems unique to the welfare system. We would be wise to take them seriously.

Literary Destruction?

I have a literary bone to pick with Nick Gillespie. In "*Boiler Room* Boilerplate"

(May), he refers to the Arthur Miller classic *Death of a Salesman* as "dramatically incoherent," presumably because it "unmasks its title character as a 'phony little fake' even as it seeks to elevate him to tragic stature." It is unfortunate that Mr. Gillespie seems to believe that the tragic form should have remained constant since the Greeks.

Miller's innovation in *Salesman* is precisely that he writes a tragedy of Everyman; he democratizes the art of tragedy. For the Greeks, one had to be royalty—an Oedipus or Electra or Ajax—to be worthy of leading a tragic existence. Miller's Willy Loman is an ordinary man. Indeed, that is the tragedy of his existence; he dreams of being royalty—or rather, of the American equivalent: being successful in business. His dreams, unrealized and ultimately unrealizable for him, eat at him, until there is nothing left but a shell. Loman's death, far from occurring at the end of the play, has occurred before the play even begins. He tells his son, "A salesman has got to dream, boy. It comes with the territory." Loman's body lives on after his dreams have died, and therein lies the tragedy of Miller's play.

This is certainly not *Oedipus Rex*, nor should it be, for Miller lives in 20th century A.D. America, not in fifth century B.C. Athens. Miller's alterations to the Greek tragic formula do not make his work "dramatically incoherent," and there is no small irony in Gillespie's assertion to the contrary, coming as it does in the middle of an editorial discussing the Schumpeterian notion of creative destruction, which, after all, applies to cultural artifacts as much as to industrial processes.

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In his editorial "*Boiler Room* Boilerplate" (May), Nick Gillespie asks, "Does it matter that most depictions of capitalism and business in popular culture are relentlessly negative?" His answer: "Films such as *Boiler Room* don't undermine or challenge capitalism as much as they further it. Indeed, by foregrounding—or even by absurdly exaggerating—the duplicity possible in a market system, they may well help it to function more efficiently."

Such duplicity does exist, of course. But everyone knows this perfectly well already. And the market already gives us abundant means of protecting against it, from *Consumer Reports* to the countless investment letters that evaluate stocks, mutual funds, brokers, corporate buyout offers, etc. At *Barron's*, where I used to work, the editors took pride in having exposed more fraud than the Securities and Exchange Commission—not because they hated business but because they wanted to prevent the bad apples from spoiling the barrel.

But a movie is a form of art, not journalism. As such its theme is inherently general; it communicates a view of what is important and essential about some domain of life. The view communicated by movies like *Boiler Room* is that the essence of business is deception and exploitation rather then productive achievement, innovation, and voluntary cooperation.

And the essential thing to say about these movies is that that view is false. To the extent that they have any cultural and political impact, it will be to encourage a false conception of business and capitalism and a corresponding propensity to support government controls. In that context, any incidental value such movies may have in promoting well-informed consumers seems insignificant.

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Nick Gillespie replies: Josh Chafetz, who is clearly familiar with Arthur Miller's self-promoting essay on *Death of a Salesman*'s tragic dimension, assumes too much. I have no interest in articulating or enforcing strict definitions of genres, whose forms and meanings absolutely change over time. Individual works of art, even ones credited with creating a form, never conform fully to such categories (indeed, even as Aristotle cites *Oedipus Rex* as the exemplary tragedy, he significantly misrepresents the drama). I find *Death of a Salesman* dramatically incoherent for a number of reasons, but the most important one is that it is never clear whether Willy Loman has ever actually been successful or whether he has always been, in Biff's words, "a phony little fake." If the latter, he hardly represents the "ordinary man" and has precious little claim on our sympathies.

Unlike David Kelley, I see no reason why "art" and "journalism" shouldn't cover similar ground and I see no reason why his defense of *Barron's* exposés shouldn't extend to other forms. One of the defining characteristics of capitalism—perhaps *the* defining characteristic, to the chagrin of many despairing Marxists—is its ability to incorporate challenges and criticisms. In any case, I'm less interested in authorial intention—*Barron's* ostensibly means to save capitalism, the director of *Boiler Room* to unmask it—than the ways in which audiences ultimately receive and use texts. As I suggested in my piece, there is little reason to believe that negative depictions of capitalists and capitalism in popular culture necessarily undermine support for markets. Indeed, we might well ponder how, after a century of much art that was emphatically anti-capitalistic, we have arrived at a moment in history where capitalism is virtually everywhere ascendant.

What's an Education Worth?

The text with the graph in "Powerful Credentials" by Michael W. Lynch (Citings, May) implies that the measure of the worth of a college education is the difference between median annual earnings for high school and college graduates. I think this is misleading from two standpoints.

First, the median annual earnings undoubtedly reflect a difference of scholastic aptitude and motivation between high school graduates who go on to college and those who do not. Furthermore, the higher income probably also reflects that college graduates are more likely to be from affluent families and thus have greater earnings because of their positions in society. To imply that those who do not go on to college would reap the same monetary rewards if they did seems erroneous.

Second, to discuss only the monetary value of a college education is to ignore its value for living a fuller life.

Allan Halderman
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Inner Space

HENRY C... "WHEN THOUGHTS TURN INWARD" 1... RT PROG...

"That's astronaut John Young, pondering the 1981 launch of Space Shuttle Columbia. But artist Henry Casselli left Young and the shuttle out of his title, instead calling the watercolor, "When Thoughts Turn Inward," thus making it a narrative work. Narrative paintings—they imply a story that the viewer must imagine—haven't had much status since Queen Victoria was buying them. Casselli's work is currently touring the country as part of an exhibit of NASA-sponsored paintings called "The Artistry of Space"; though it is among the least obviously concerned with the final frontier, it's one of the show's most popular.

"Artists," said the late Hereward Lester Cooke, "should be the key witnesses to history in the making." Cooke was the National Gallery's painting curator and an adviser to NASA's self-promotional art program. "In the long run, the truth seen by the artist is more meaningful than any other type of record."

Yet few turn to gallery painters for the "truth" about space. To see space-related art that has had any cultural impact, one must turn to commercial works: pulp art, paperback covers (many of them abstract), Hollywood posters. An essential difference is that commercial artists are emphatically not mere "witnesses."

They either engage you or have failed. In inviting you to detect a story, Casselli has managed to place an old form at the service of a contemporary subject. In so doing, he too has chosen to be something other than a witness.

—Charles Paul Freund

Time to End the Corporate Income Tax

Kenneth L. Judd
is a
senior fellow
at the
Hoover Institution.

The corporate income tax—a feature of the U.S. tax system for several decades—is a natural part of a tax system that seeks out income and taxes it wherever it is found. Such a system is flawed, however, and the corporate income tax is one of its most serious flaws.

Through a corporation, large groups of investors can pool their resources, share their risks, and adjust their investments through stock market trading. Although partnerships are a less flexible way to organize a business in that they rely on a relatively small number of investors who can adjust their share only through costly negotiations, their small size creates more accountability. The choice between organization types depends on various trade-offs that the market can work out.

A firm becomes a corporation when it needs capital to grow, even though this decision brings with it the corporate income tax, which effectively takes one-third of all profits ever generated by a new corporation but puts up no cash.

The corporate income tax distorts the allocation of capital between partnerships and corporations by forcing corporations to offer a higher return on investment since they must both pay their investors a competitive return and give the government its third. Thus enterprises that can be efficiently organized as partnerships, such as commercial real estate companies, have easier access to capital since they do not pay corporate income tax, causing too much capital to be directed to such activities.

This misallocation of capital is particularly damaging for a dynamic economy such as that of the United States, whose economic growth comes from innovation. Innovation is an expensive and risky activity, however, and often requires the advantages of a corporation. **The United States tax policy should be revised to encourage innovation**, which benefits not only the innovator but also consumers through new products and workers through higher productivity. Instead, the corporate income tax discourages innovation and thus damages growth.

The burden of the corporate income tax can be reduced by a variety of reforms. For instance, many European countries allow investors to be credited on their personal tax bills for income taxes paid by the corporations they own. Phasing out the corporate income tax for old firms and eliminating it for new corporations would produce large benefits with small losses in revenue. With some ingenuity, the political process can find some way to rid our economy of this burden and benefit investors, consumers, and workers. The corporate income tax is an anachronism. Eliminating it would help maintain strong economic growth.

— Kenneth L. Judd

Paid for by the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

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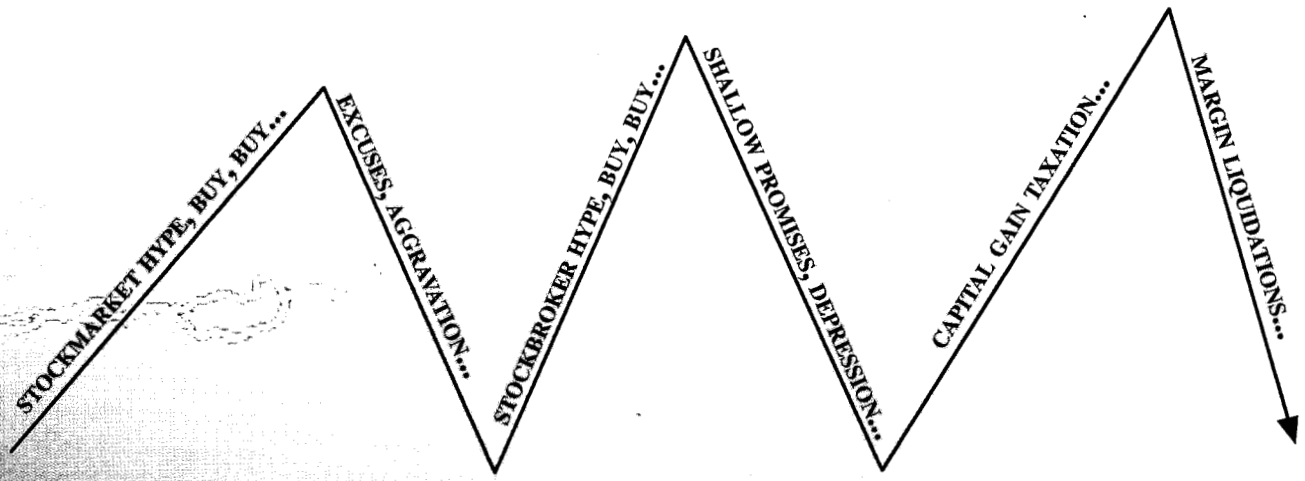

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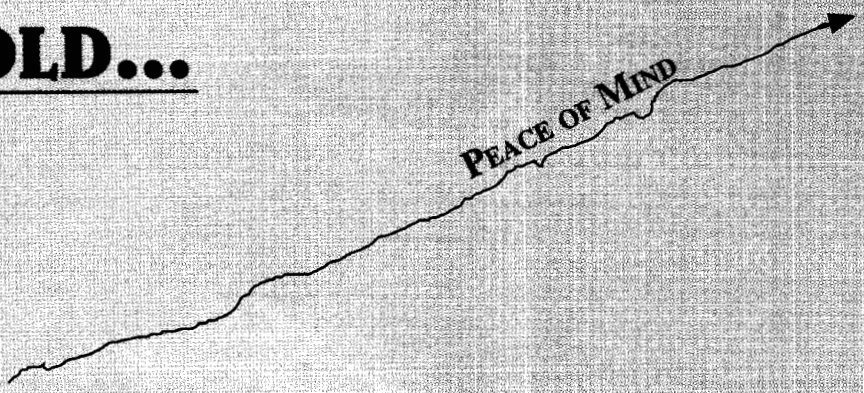

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